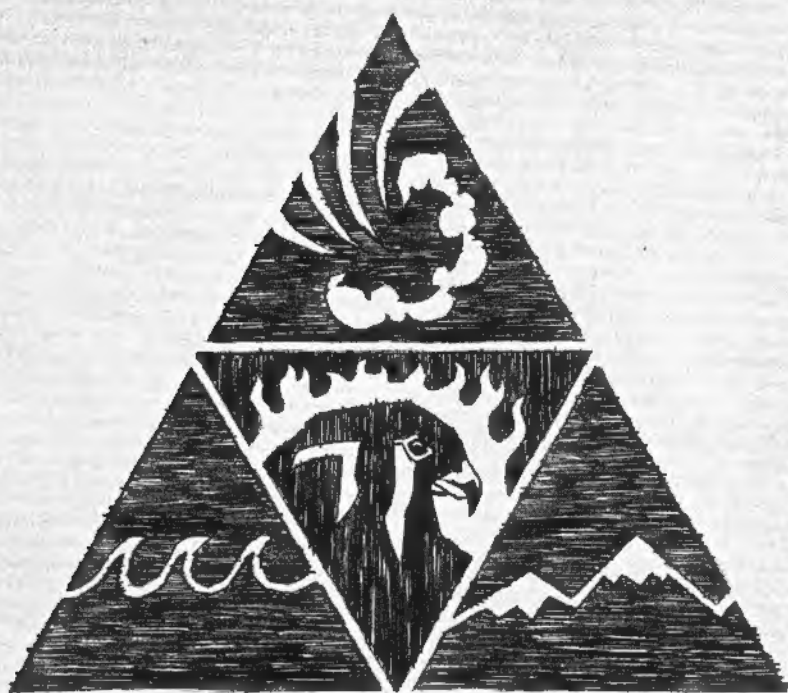


PROVIDENCE

THE KESTRELS: BECOMING FIRE





MIMURA

THE KESTRELS: BECOMING FIRE

THE KESTRELS  BECOMING FIRE

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THE KESTRELS ARE BECOMING FIRE

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

This book is dedicated to the memory of Cheng Man-ch'ing. Your word lives on, O Sensei.



Providence is a world virtually bereft of religion, spiritual belief, and oftentimes of hope; where the temptation to give up, to cease struggling, and look only to the hopelessness of the surrounding world is ever-present.

Kestrels are different

The Order is a legend in the long, troubled history of the Yas'Wailians. For nearly seven millennia the Kestrels have persisted through a long and chaotic process of reinvention. Though they are now bodyguards and their numbers have dwindled, in truth they serve none but themselves, seeking spiritual progress as they patiently perfect the art of Becoming Fire. History has taught the Order that progress is only earned through conflict. If some people wish to make their progress that much easier by employing them, who are they to argue?

The enigmatic Kestrels, with their dyed-black skin and arcane rituals, have achieved a level of mystique throughout Providence. For many people, especially those of the lower castes, the only glimpse they will catch of a Kestrel is that of a loosely-clad, unarmed warrior. Kestrels are constantly by the side of a noble and silently alert for any hint of danger.

The martial arts of the Kestrels are renowned for their deadly grace. Members of the Pure, Blessed and Gifted caste zealously hire Kestrels as personal guards, chaperones and even status symbols. To employ a Kestrel is as much a statement of one's social stature as it is of self-preservation.

This, then, is a guide to the true nature of the Order of Kestrels. The first half of the book, chapters 1-5, teach the history, traditions and beliefs of the Order. chapters 6 & 7 deal with creating Kestrel characters and integrating them into your Providence campaigns. Finally, chapter 8 contains a short adventure introducing the Kestrels.

Throughout all worlds there are spiritual warriors; now discover the most deadly of all.

THE NEW WARRIOR

"Do not misunderstand me, young one. To be a Kestrel is to embody the spirit of peace. We fight so that others need not, and only one who is at peace with their own true nature may do so with any certainty of cause. Many fail, but many also succeed. Such is the nature of man."

— Kalia, Dai'jan of Sunarius

A NEW WARRIOR WALKS AMONG US

Tonight, Elidia Charash becomes an adult in the eyes of the Order of Kestrels. Elidia has been my protege for the last year, an impressively short time in which to attain the mantle of Kenjha. She has learnt well, and now her reward is due.

I remember when Elidia first came to us as a girl, just two years ago. She was but fourteen years of age, and many of us openly laughed at the young, proud Eagle who stood at the gate. Elidia was haughty and demanding, believing it was her right to join the Order. To our shame we — and our Shojan Wileas Ashen-Wing, Head Quartermaster of all Kestrels within Cliff-Spider — believed her to be wrong.

"She is just a child," mocked Stefan, a veteran Dragon. "Her wings are barely full-grown!"

"We are already taking fifty Immature this year, O Shojan," added Brachtus, "and that is nearly too many! We cannot afford to stretch ourselves any further!"

Wileas regarded Brachtus with a cool gaze. "That decision is mine to make young Hawk, and mine alone. Nevertheless, I can see no profit arising from our taking this child. Begone, youngster. There is no place for you here."

It was Kalia, Dai'jan of the Keep, who saw the child for what she was. The Coloured Quartermaster, a Dove Wird caster of unquestionable insight, had been watching the display from the periphery. Now she stepped forward and placed her hand on Elidia's shoulder, gazing deep into her eyes. While the rest of us looked on, Kalia whispered something to the child, inaudible to the rest of us. As Kalia spoke, wisps of Wird light began to flow around the two of them. Kalia continued to speak while Elidia responded quietly.

Finally, after a seeming age had passed, Elidia collapsed into Kalia's arms, whispering and crying at her breast. Kalia held her gently, reassuring her. "I know. I know."

Then Kalia rose and turned to address Wileas. "This child is called Elidia. She is worthy, and you would do well to accept her, O Shojan of Sunarius. Judge her not by age — she will not fail you." With that Kalia turned on her heel and left.

THE KESTRELS
BECOMING FIRE

Wileas did not pretend to understand Kalia's reasons; the old man is renowned for being one of the least Wird-sensitive Kestrels on Providence. Nonetheless, his trust in his Dai'jan was complete, and so Elidia became one of the Immature.

Soon after her training commenced, it became clear that Elidia was a fast and deadly student. Having pummelled her fellow Immature while sparring, she also displayed an aptitude for the Wird ways. Under Kalia's teaching she practised kata after kata, often late into the early morning, striving for perfection.

After a year, both Kalia and Wileas deemed Elidia fit to begin undertaking assignments. I was chosen to be her first mentor, along with her two Immature dorm-mates. When Wileas informed me that I was to be their only companion for the assignment, I was somewhat shocked, as I have repaid my dues and been mentor to more than enough bands of Immature in the past. Nonetheless, Wileas was adamant that one as experienced as I should accompany them.

I suspected this was due to Elidia's presence, but did not press the matter. By now even Elidia's fiercest critics had renounced their original doubts. In the face of one so able and keen as she, there was little option.

That first assignment will remain in my memory until I die. It was a simple bodyguard assignment. A senior member of the Guild of Chirurgeons had begun to fear for her safety within King Roldwin's Royal Court and thus desired a permanent bodyguard, perhaps more for a deterrent as anything else. This was a common job to assign an Immature Kestrel trio, as the possibility of actual conflict was very low.

As the four of us left the Keep to make our way to the Guild Manor, the nerves of the young ones were showing. Elidia, in particular, flew a little erratically as we soared upward through the tunnels and chambers of Cliff-Spider. Finally, she began questioning me.

"If the Chirurgeon is attacked, it is our job to defend her, yes? Even with our lives?"

"Even with our lives," I answered. "Otherwise, there would be little point in our being there."

Elidia pondered this point for a moment, as if building up the courage to ask her next question. Finally, she asked "What would we do if she were attacked by a student of our Ginjan?"

I smiled faintly. She had obviously thought this question through many times before asking. It was a common enough enquiry.

"It will not happen," I replied. "All of the assassins in our Keep are under the coordination of the Ginjan. It is part of his responsibilities to see that his warriors' tasks do not interfere with ours."

"Oh." Again, she pondered. "But what of assassins from other Keeps? Could they not be unaware of our charge?"

"Again, the answer is no. No Kestrel assassin may undertake a foreign assignment without first accepting the Ginjan's coordination; any who do, do so at their own risk. Rest assured, warriors who attack the Chirurgeon do so without the knowledge of our Shojan." I paused to smile. "All who dare to are thus fair game."

Her fears seemingly allayed, Elidia was silent for the rest of the journey, and her roommates, Yulank and Shaymon, spent the time idly gossiping. Finally we reached the Guild Manor. We were presented to Andrilosa, our charge, who explained she had been warned by confidantes that her position was envied. When she received death-threats in the form of anonymous letters, she finally decided to call upon our services.

I was aware that the youngsters were trying to listen carefully to Andrilosa as she spoke in her soft, Swan voice. They were also trying to take in the surroundings of the Chirurgeon's elegant chamber. From the plush furnishings and sparse but expensive decoration, it was clear she was indeed a senior Guild member. The three Immatres were obviously taken aback by the wealth.

Despite their curiosity, the students were dutiful and respectful, and none more so than Elidia. Over the next week, as we stayed with our charge day and night, Elidia became more relaxed and at ease with her surroundings. She even began to show humour towards the daily proceedings in the halls of King Raldowin's court.

Her relaxation and carelessness very nearly led to her downfall. On the sixth night, as Andrilosa lay sleeping and Elidia shared the watch with Yulank, a shadowy figure somehow made a noiseless entry into our charge's bedchamber. Shaymon and I were also asleep; I was woken only by the sharp clank of a blade falling to the floor, followed by the scream of a woman.

By the time I made my way from the adjoining room, the noise stopped. I burst through the door, fearing that the two Immatres were dead and believing Andrilosa to be in mortal danger. Cursing my decision to leave them alone with the Chirurgeon, I fell into the low fighting stance of my Tekkan Art, ready to strike at any possible attacker.

Instead, the sight before my eyes made me both proud and nauseous at the same time, in spite of my fifteen years as a Kenjha. Andrilosa sat crouched on her bed, her knees drawn up to her face in fright; Yulank stood on the far side of the room, her face a mask of terror. Near the side of the bed stood Elidia, hands aflame and blood flowing freely from where her left ear had been. She stood over the prone form of a Raven assassin, and the damage she had done. The intruder's right arm lay at an impossible angle, broken in at least four places. His tunic was charred, portions still burning. Most horrific of all, his features were indefinable from the blackened, molten skin that covered his skull.

Following this incident, Elidia was taken back to the Keep for further training in her command of Wird. Neither I nor her roommates saw her in the field again for a month. Kalia focused all her energies on the young, proud Eagle who had nearly lost her life on her first assignment. Elidia's missing ear served as a reminder, and never again would she be complacent.

When our Order once more assigned work to her, Elidia had changed. Walking out of the Keep and into Cliff-Spider, I was pleased to accompany the young woman who tonight becomes Kenjha. Elidia was serious, dedicated, and skilful. Gone was her haughty, proud nature; she ceased to ask questions, preferring instead to carefully study my actions.

For the remainder of the last year I have watched this young woman develop her powers, both as a practitioner of the Yokosh Art and as a Wird caster. I have saved her from her mistakes, and she has never made the same one twice. Elidia even saved my life once when her Wird powers destroyed a party of hostile Serpenkine intent on killing the merchant we guarded. This battle enabled me to award her the final, third Plen scar necessary to become Kenjha.

Now I stand upon the walls of the Sunarius Keep, watching our Dai'jan Kalia prepare the courtyard for the ceremony. In keeping with tradition, Elidia is ensconced in her dormitory, no doubt being alternately teased and praised by Yulank and Shaymon until she is called.

Below me, Kalia has finished drawing the triangle in the ground and the pyre has been built next to the sacred fire. Now, with the aid of her best two students, she incants a spiritual cleansing spell over the area. Their voices are low and repetitive; I lose track of time as I watch them move around the triangle from point to point, performing Wird-infused katas.

Suddenly, or so it seems, it is night. I realise I have stood upon the wall watching Kalia and her acolytes for two hours, and now their ritual is complete. I fly down to join the other Kenjha who are now assembling around the triangle; Wileas is also there, even though his presence is not necessary at the ritual to come.

Elidia is brought from her dormitory and guided to stand at the apex of the triangle in the sand, facing those who are now her comrades. Her fresh Plen scars are prominent against the light brown of her face, and her eyes are bright with expectation. The pyre is lit, and as the flames lick the wood, Kalia begins the ceremony.

"O Sacred Fire, hear me! Here stands Elidia Charash, who has learnt well. Tonight, in honour of her final Plen, she becomes Kenjha of the Order of Kestrels, serving Wileas, O Shojan of this Sunarius Keep in the city of Cliff-Spider ..."

The words are familiar to us all, and my gaze begins to wander around the assembled throng. On the opposite side I see Stefan, eyeing Elidia carefully. Next to him is Brachtus, the first among us to admit that his harsh initial judgement of Elidia was wrong. Instead, his eyes now confer admiration and pride for the young Eagle; it is not so long since Brachtus himself stood at the apex of this very triangle.

The ceremonial words have been spoken. Elidia has sworn her loyalty to the Order, as Eagle and as Kenjha. A new cloak is brought for her to wear. As she holds it around herself, Kalia steps toward the now-raging pyre and plunges her hand into its heart. From out of the fire she takes the Seal of Sunarius Keep, a triangle of red stone, and gives it to Elidia. Though the stone is still red-hot, Elidia takes it without complaint and uses it to clasp her cloak.

Tomorrow she will go to the baths and undergo Enshod-Mai, the ritual of the berry-dye. But tonight we celebrate. Tonight, a new warrior walks among us.

THE KESTRELS



IRE

GLOSSARY

BAIK'SHO — The secret convention held to elect a new Trian.

BECOMING FIRE — The spiritual goal of all Kestrels. Each combat brings them closer to this ideal.

DAI'JAN — The Coloured Quartermaster of a Keep, a Wird user responsible for teaching katas, Wird use, Shard power optimization and spiritual guidance for the Keep.

ENSHOD-MAI — *"The ritual of the berry-dye"* — The monthly dyeing of the skin with black berries.

ESHO-GINJA'KLIN — One of the Nine Arts.

THE FOUNDER — The legendary first Kestrel, who Became Fire.

GATH HADATCHI — The enigmatic band of Kestrels who serve the Trian.

GINJAN — The secret Quartermaster of assassins within a Keep, responsible for the training and management of assassins.

HADJI-MAI — *"The ritual of respect"* — The combat ritual performed by two Kestrels from different Keeps upon first meeting.

IASHA'KLIN — One of the Nine Arts.

IASHA-MAI — *"The ritual of trial by fire"* — The strengthening of the hands and feet with hot coals.

IMMATURE — A Kestrel who has not yet reached the full complement of three Plen required to be declared Kenjha.

INNER FIRE — The spiritual strength which lies within.

KENJHA — *"Warrior"* — A mature, adult Kestrel.

KANJHA-MAI — *"The ritual of Maturity"* — The coming of age of a Kestrel from Immature to Kenjha.

KENJHO — *"Warrior Master"* — A senior Kestrel who acts as advisor and assistant to the Shojan.

KEN-DOYJHA — *"Warrior of the Hearth"* — A Kestrel who is responsible for "housekeeping" tasks around the Keep.

MAI-SHAN — One of the Nine Arts.

MOSS MASKS — Wird-infused items used by the Gath Hadatchi to disguise their true identity.

NINE ARTS — The nine styles of martial art which the Kestrels practice.

PLEN — The victory scars beneath the eyes of every Kenjha.

PLEN-MAI — *"The ritual of eye-scarring"* — The scarring of the skin underneath the eyes after a successful battle.

QUARTERMASTER — One of three leaders within a Keep.

SCHISM — The time of the liberation of the prison camps, when the Kestrels were divided in their loyalties.

SEAL — A coloured triangle of stone which all Kestrels wear to identify their home Keep.

SERA'KLIN — One of the Nine Arts.

SHIP'KLIN — The first and most common of the Nine Arts.

SHOJAN — The head Quartermaster of a Keep, responsible for overall management, combat tutoring and the teaching of medicine.

SU'MACHAO — One of the Nine Arts.

T'CHAO — One of the Nine Arts.

TEKKAN — One of the Nine Arts.

TRI'ASHA — *"The philosophy of the Three Fires"* — The overriding belief of the Kestrels in the sacred nature of the number three.

TRIAN — The triumvirate of Kestrels in charge of the Order. Allegedly named after one of the first three Disciples of the Founder.

YOKOSH — One of the Nine Arts.

YANZA'SHO — A weekly court held by the Shojan.

YINSHA'JAN — *"Rogues"* — Those Kestrels who have been exiled from the Order, yet continue to ply their trade.

CHAPTER TWO

HISTORY

"For I am the protector of my Lords and the bringer of destruction to their enemies. I know not creed, religion, nor caste. I am blind to Traupial, god and Wird alike, for I am the living fire who sees into the heart of mortals, and one who can stand beside me in battle is worthy enough."

— The Founder

Much of the history of the Order of Kestrels is no more than myth and legend. No two Kestrels will agree over the finer points of their history, though all stand united on general principles. What follows is not to be taken as literal fact; whether the Founder even truly existed is a source of much debate. However, this is the history of the Order as all young members learn it, and it serves as an explanation for many of their beliefs and traditions.

THE PAST

THE FOUNDER

The Founder's name is lost in the mists of millennia long passed. It is enough to know this man lived in the fifth millennium before the Exile, and was a mighty warrior who served the rulers of Yas'Wail. In those days there were no Kestrels, only lone men and women of strength and valour. This man was the strongest and bravest of them all, and highly sought after throughout Yas'Wail.

Even the strongest warriors, regardless of caste or gender, must come upon trials they will struggle to defeat. So it was with the Founder, who was in dire straits while journeying through wild lands, heeding the call of a king who wished to hire his services. The journey was arduous, and after fifteen days of flight the Founder was only halfway to his destination.

It was then, in the remote hills of Shu'klin, that the Founder underwent the Three Trials. Coming to a hilltop, he rested for a while before continuing, and built a fire to warm himself. As the flames grew high he sensed something was amiss. Before the Founder could cast about for the source of this uneasy feeling, the very fire surged up and about him, though it did not burn his flesh. Then the fire spoke.

It told the Founder he was wasting his time and skills journeying to this king: the matter was already settled, and his work was no longer needed. Instead, it entreated him to learn from its wisdom, to join with it and realise his full potential.

Ever shrewd and suspicious, the Founder doubted the fire's supposed knowledge. He declined its offer, heading instead to the kingdom.

So it was that the Founder reached the kingdom after another fifteen days and found the fire had spoken truth. All that remained of the kingdom was a demolished Keep, a razed countryside, and butchered peasantry. Finding one of the few survivors, the Founder asked about what had happened. He was told a warlike nearby king had attacked, suddenly and swiftly, destroying all in his path. The local king was unprepared and quickly lost the battle.

Now the Founder saw how the fire had spoken truth, and he returned to the hilltop in Shii'klin.

He was not disappointed; after a day's meditation, he built another fire on the same hill and waited. Once again, the fire enveloped him and spoke. This time the Founder told the fire of his discovery that it had spoken truthfully. The fire entreated him to join with it and fulfil both their destinies. He would become not only the greatest warrior Yas'Wail had ever seen, but also embody the spirit of the fire. The fire would live through his feats, for fire was the only element on Yas'Wail with no god to watch over it.

So began the Three Trials of the Founder.

The First Trial was one of skill. The Founder was already one of Yas'Wail's mightiest warriors, but he was not skilled in Wird. The fire taught him the ways of the Tapestry, and how these skills could be combined with combat, elevating his prowess to a state unmatched throughout the world. For three months atop the hills of Shii'klin the Founder learnt and practised the Art. The fire guided him until he was as sure and swift in fighting as the kestrel bird is in hunting its prey.

The Second Trial was wisdom. Here the Founder was taught the nature of fire, that which may destroy all yet cannot be struck with weapons forged of man. The Founder cast aside his earthly weapons and saw the wisdom in doing so, for now the only thing that could disarm him were the powers of the other three elements themselves. As surely as fire passes through all earthly things, so too was the Founder given the Inner Sight, that which can see into the hearts of the living and find their weakest spots, their inner nature, their very soul.

The Third Trial was of conquering fear, an opponent more formidable than any creature. For thirty days the Founder realised and lived through his greatest fears and nightmares, until finally there was only one task left — to prove his faith to the fire. Upon the highest hill in Shii'klin, the Founder prepared a pyre. When the flames burned their highest, he stepped into them without fear. The pain was immense, and many times he believed he would surely perish, but the Founder's faith did not waiver. And so he Became Fire itself, the unstoppable destroyer of mortals. When the flames subsided, a jet-black kestrel swooped down to settle amongst the embers, and the Founder saw his skin and feathers were burnt as black as coal. The Trials were over.



The Founder had now been absent from Yas'Wailian society for half a year; it was time to return home and teach those who would learn the ways of the Fire. When he finally returned from the Shi'klin hills, black as night and dressed in rags, three warriors encountered and challenged him, believing the Founder to be a mad peasant with no rightful place in the city.

The Founder gazed into their hearts. Finding them to be true, he offered each in turn a trial by combat, to which they agreed with mocking laughter. Their mundane skills were no match for his newfound powers, and each was dispatched easily in turn. As the fracas ended, once again the jet-black kestrel swooped down from above, this time landing on the Founder's shoulder.

The three defeated warriors, one of whom was named Trian, took their loss with grace and awe. Each in turn asked the Founder's forgiveness and for him to teach them his mastery of the Art, which he called Shi'klin out of respect. Knowing their souls to be true, the Founder agreed, and these three became his first disciples.

Taking the repeated appearance of the bird as an omen, the Founder decided to adopt it as their herald, for the kestrel is a patient hunter, hovering to study its prey before choosing the moment to strike. Thus was born the Order of Kestrels.

THE ORDER

In time, more disciples joined the ranks of the Order, and within a few centuries the Kestrels became known throughout Yas'Wail as the finest and bravest warriors. Yas'Wail's greatest kings put the skills of the Kestrels to good use, and the Order became synonymous with bravery and grace. All Kestrels guarded their charges with their lives and souls.

As with all organizations that prosper, a hierarchy grew out of the need for consistency and stability. The first Trian was named after one of the first disciples of the Founder. Members of the Order appointed the Trian at the first formal meeting of all Kestrels. The remaining Kestrels voted the eldest and wisest members to the position of Shojan. The Shojans each took a region of Yas'Wail and called it their own. Soon their responsibilities and duties became so great they appointed Wird users to be Dai'jan and take over the teaching of Wird to their charges. In time, the Ginjan also became necessary to organise the secret assassins of the Kestrels.

The Order's beliefs and practices became ritualised and mythologised; Enshod-Mai, originally only practised by a few devoted Kenjha, became commonplace. So too did Plen-Mai to quantify the matter of maturity, previously open to vastly different interpretations. The Dai'jan began encouraging all in the Order to meditate and perform ritual food sacrifices to the spirits of long-dead Kestrels, and especially the Founder. Thus the Kestrels became a true order, and its growth as a result was enormous.

The Order continued to grow and prosper for five millennia, until the time of the rebellion. The Kestrels took no sides in the war, as they had no god to pledge allegiance to. But this in turn resulted in a conflict between them, since they worked for both factions. Soon Kestrel fought Kestrel, and when the war was over, their numbers were lessened and some of their knowledge was lost. Their reputation, though, was intact. The rulers of Yas'Wail elected them to serve the Warden families during the exile to Providence.

THE SCHISM

Guarding the Wardens in the prison world of Providence suited the Kestrels well. For the first four hundred years, until the liberation of the first camps, they were dutiful and loyal assistants to the Wardens. Unfortunately, the liberation of the rebels also caused what Kestrels call the Schism, a futile internal war.

Many Kestrels acted as spies and emissaries for the remaining Wardens during the time of the liberation, sometimes fighting alongside Ravagers. Many members also worked for the free cities, particularly in Cliff-Spider. Soon Kestrel fought Kestrel, and many arguments about the nature of such activities escalated into outright hostility.

Most of the older Kenjha had old friends or relatives working for the Trinity Alliance of Wardens, an alliance of the Water-Sister, Green-Deep and Bone-Wail camps. They despaired at fighting their former brethren. However, the younger Kestrels who had never met or known any of those still working for the Wardens took a more progressive stance, believing in the liberated cities' righteousness.

Soon the Kestrels of the Free Cities, an alliance between Cliff-Spider and Cry-Star, were fighting not one but two battles. They fought their brothers who still worked for the Wardens, and they fought each other. Those Kestrels who believed that the old ways should be retained fought to keep control from the younger members, who considered their elders weak.

Before long, many of the older Kestrels had either been slain or had "escaped" to the relative safety of the Trinity Alliance prison colonies.

Residing in Cliff-Spider, the Trian found itself under attack from all sides. The first Trian elder, Jherl Dishan, was slain by a large band of Kestrels from the Trinity Alliance. The second, Shelo Graywing, fled into the wilderness of Providence and was never seen again. But the third, a female Dragon named Sind'ila Yokosh, took the side of progress.

Yokosh, a formidable Wird user, gathered around herself the strongest and bravest of the young Kenjha. She led them around Providence in a thirty-year evangelical mission. Yokosh tried to convince others of the Free Cities to join them and restore unity and purpose to the Order. A charismatic speaker and respected leader, Yokosh succeeded, though not without losing the loyalty of many older Kestrels along the way. As a result, all ties with the Kestrels working for the Trinity were severed. A new order was forged.

A NEW BREED

As members of the Alliance and Wardens met to sign the Exodus Truce, the new Order of Kestrels held a meeting of its own in the mountains of Leviathan's Spine, between Bastion and Haak San Bazaa. Here, Yokosh pronounced a new dawn for the Order and proceeded to redefine its rules and ethics. She dispensed with many of the rituals and sacrifices of the Kestrels, adopting instead a new way that emphasised the power of the Inner Fire over reverence of the past.

Learning from the errors an open Order had caused, Yokosh began rebuilding the Kestrels into the organisation we know today. She demanded secrecy from all within the Order and withdrawal from society at large into the Keeps. Yokosh appointed two new members to the Trian from her best and most loyal Quartermasters; furthermore, future Trian elections were to be conducted in secret. Never again would their identities and homes be known to their enemies, Kestrels or not.

The Gath Hadatchi were also formed to protect the interests of the Trian within the Order itself. The first Gath Hadatchi were hand-picked from the best Kestrels in Providence at the time. To ensure loyalty and secrecy, within two generations they started the practice of taking a child at birth and training them from the cradle. Finally, this resulted in the formidable reputation the Gath Hadatchi have today.

Cliff-Spider had been a home to the largest grouping of Kestrels before the Schism. To members of the Order, it made sense to consolidate the trust they had with the city's former Wardens, now rulers in the Alliance, by maintaining a Keep in the city. So it was that Cliff-Spider became the largest and most prestigious Keep in Providence.

New Shojan, appointed by Yokosh herself, set up other Keeps. These Shojans appointed their own Dai'jan and Ginjan. Soon, the new Kestrel Order had returned to a stable hierarchy, similar to its days on Yas'Wail, albeit with a rougher, more selfish outlook.

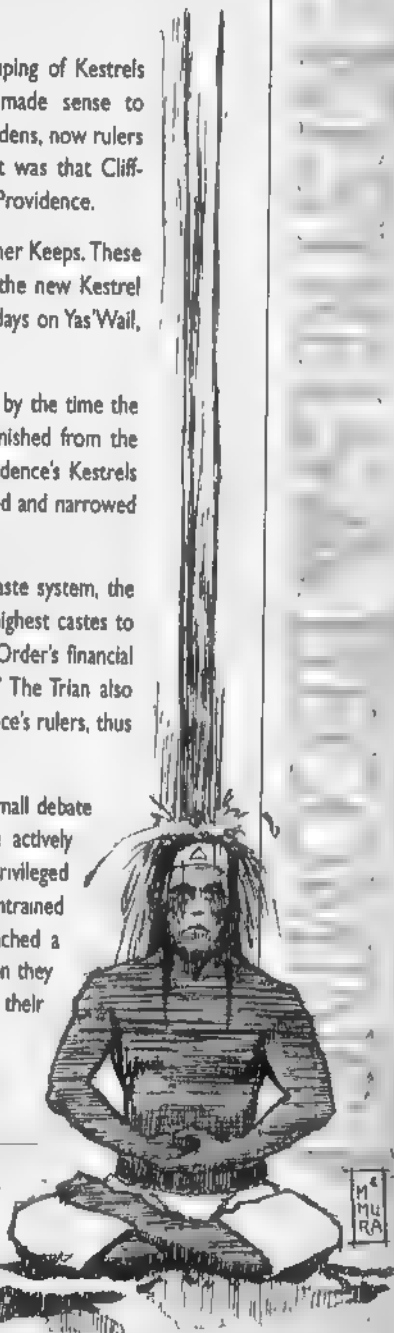
Kestrels had almost lost the full art of Wird casting by the time the Order came to Providence; during the Schism, it had vanished from the Order completely. From their records and legends, Providence's Kestrels developed and practised their own form of Wird, optimised and narrowed to focus on the warrior's fighting arts.

After the implementation of the Alliance of Kings' caste system, the Order passed a law enabling only members of the three highest castes to hire the services of a Kestrel. This not only ensured the Order's financial stability but also characterised them as a "status symbol." The Trian also believed this law would cement their position with Providence's rulers, thus ensuring their survival.

The rapid increase in numbers of Shards caused no small debate within the Order. Many members argued they should be actively encouraged to join lest they endanger the Kestrels' privileged position in society. Others, however, saw the Shards as untrained amateurs, and not worthy of admittance. Finally, they reached a compromise — Shards were allowed to join on the condition they undergo the same training as all other Kestrels, regardless of their age or abilities.

THE PRESENT

The Order has changed a great deal since its inception. Modern Kestrels, while still regarded as spiritualists compared to most, are nowhere near as philosophical and religious as they were on Yas'Wail. Much of their knowledge remains



lost, particularly the powers of the Inner Fire. Compared to their heyday on Yas'Wail, their numbers are greatly diminished, numbering at most only five thousand across all of Providence.

Nevertheless, the Kestrels find themselves more in demand than ever in these troubled times. The conflict raging in the courts of many cities, the threat of war with the Lost Tribes, and the uneasy alliance between the Alliance of Kings and Bone-Wail ensure the Order's survival. A Kestrel guard is becoming a necessity for many nobles.

In addition, Regent Caiylus, head of the Alliance of Kings, has expressed interest in obtaining the Order's services to explore the land and find new gates. Though training specific Kestrels in the more hardy practice of wilderness survival will require some time, it is an undertaking many Shojan are endeavouring to accomplish.

Furthermore, the Order of Kestrels is not familiar with the workings of the guilds. Kestrels are hoping to benefit greatly from accompanying members of the Archers, Cartographers and Messengers across the land.

One group of Kestrels in particular is pushing the Order forward, and this time it is located in Haak San Bazaa. The Al-Budozan Keep is no stranger to politics. Sharonjit, Shojan of Haak San Bazaa, is using every ounce of influence she possesses to ensure the Order is not "overlooked" when people leave to explore the realm. She believes that the Kestrels must become involved with Providence's other groups if they are to survive. Even the Order is not exempt from the game of politics.

There is a darker side to the increased co-operation between Kestrels and others. Many wise Kestrels fear that with the growing conflicts in Providence, the Order may become diluted and divided among the many factions. In addition, the Order fears that some of its long-lost brethren may still be working for the Wardens in Bone-Wail or elsewhere; who knows what secrets these former members may possess? Furthermore, the Ginjan are finding their work increasingly difficult to coordinate. Nobles travel from city to city and assassinations must often be delayed so as not to anger other Keeps within the Order.

THE FUTURE

The Order of Kestrels has survived for seven millennia; its leaders have no intention of allowing it to die out now. The Order is assured of three things. Wherever the present crisis takes Providence, there will always be leaders who need protection, there will always be a need for great warriors. Lastly, Kestrels know that there will always be Fire.

CHAPTER THREE

TRADITIONS

PHILOSOPHY

"If a weapon can be knocked aside, it is no weapon but a hindrance."

— ancient Kestrel motto

"Victory is decided before the first blow is struck."

— Sind'ila Yokosh, Trian and Reformer

The reformations of Sind'ila Yokosh caused many changes within the Order of Kestrels, including the summary dismissal of many old rituals and practices. Nonetheless, no organisation as ancient as the Kestrels may shrug off its old values entirely; thus many endured, and still do today. The Kestrels are an order bound by tradition and ritual; some things will never change.

TRIA'SHA: THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE THREE FIRES

Three is an almost sacred number to the Kestrels, underlying almost everything they do. The most basic reason for this is that there are three additional elements (air, earth, water) to fire, which the Kestrels themselves personify. The Kestrel way of life demonstrates Tria'sha in many different ways:

- Three eye-scars are needed for a Kestrel to become Kenjha, or "Mature."
- All Kenjha wear a coloured triangle of Wird-crafted stone, known as the "Seal."
- Young Kestrels must share dormitories with two other members.
- There are three Trian, to symbolize the Founder's three disciples.
- There are three ranks within the Order: Trian, Quartermaster and Kenjha.
- Payment is always in multiples of three.
- When Kestrels band together (only common among the Immature), they generally do so in teams of three.
- Each Keep has three Quartermasters.
- There are nine styles of fighting, known as the Nine Arts.

FIRE

When the Founder underwent the three trials that led to the formation of the Order, the final test was that of fire. He had to Become Fire in order to pass the trial and become the greatest warrior on Yas'Wail. He succeeded, but in the process his skin was burnt jet-black. This led to the modern ritual of Enshod-Mai (see page 25) to symbolise the Founder's sacrifice.

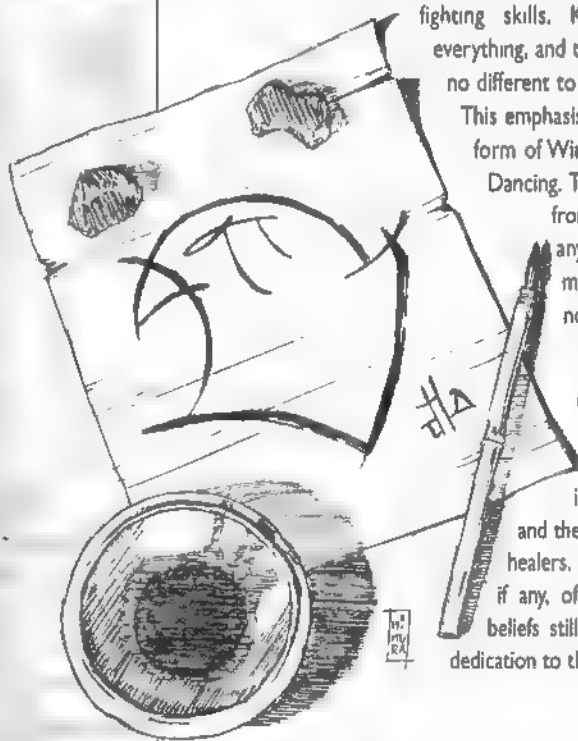
Each time Kestrels fight or perform katas they are taking another step towards Becoming Fire. As they claim, fire needs only the breath of life (i.e. Air) to become an unstoppable force, and thus Kestrels are greatly in tune with the element of Air. Kestrels call the combined spiritual energy of these two elements "Iasha," meaning literally "burning soul."

Since fire needs only air, Kestrels do not carry weapons — they do not need them, for they themselves are the ultimate weapon. To this end, all Kestrels regularly toughen their hands and feet with hot coals in weekly rituals (see page 25).

THE OTHER ARTS

Kestrels regard themselves as artists. On Yas'Wail, the Kestrels' proficiency in poetry, painting and medicine was almost as important as their fighting skills. Kestrels believe that Wird infuses everything, and thus moving with the Wird in combat is no different to moving with it in dance, song, and art. This emphasis on movement means that the Kestrel form of Wird use is similar in many ways to Wird Dancing. There are even spells that spell casters from both schools share in common. If anything however, the Kestrels focus even more on spells that affect themselves and not their environment.

Post-Schism, however, the emphasis on non-fighting skills lessened, partly because there were few Kestrels who remained loyal to the old ways. Now, it is generally only the Quartermasters and the Trian who are fully trained warriors and healers. Most Kestrels are only proficient in one, if any, of the other Arts. The Kestrels' central beliefs still hold true, but there is no longer the dedication to them there once was.



Similarly, Kestrels used to be more harmonious, revering ancient Kestrels and nature itself. They would offer food sacrifices to their ancestors and practice contemplative meditation on nature. Again, post-Schism, these customs lost importance, particularly as many Kestrels felt that their ancestors betrayed them.

Gradually, belief came to revolve more around regaining the power of the Inner Fire and the potential of the self. The Trian is regarded as closest to the ancestral spirits but few, if any, sacrifices are still made to the Kestrels' leaders.

HISTORY WRITING

The Trian members are in charge of recording all that befalls the Kestrels. In the past, this gave them a vast library of knowledge and a political edge. The information was only ever revealed to other Trian, so its power was limited, but significant nonetheless.

Most of the records were lost when the Kestrels came to Providence, and they only resumed proper history-writing 500 years ago. This has resulted in a reinterpretation that is no more accurate than any other group's view of the past. Kestrels and Quartermasters often received inscrutable orders with no explanation. Unfortunately, most members of the Order regard the Trian (misguidedly) as the seat of all knowledge.

RITUALS

"The practice known as Enshod-Mai is, without doubt, the oddest ritual amongst the Order of Kestrels. That an organisation of hardy warriors has simultaneously become so masochistic and vain is ... well ... just plain odd."

—Thular Gondrin, Raven Historian

The philosophy of the Order of Kestrels is embodied nowhere better than in its rituals. So serious are these rituals that a Kenjha will be expelled from the order for refusing to take part.

HADJI-MAI: THE RITUAL OF RESPECT

When the Founder came down from the hills of Shi'k'din, his first encounter with those who were to become his disciples was in combat. To symbolise this, when two Kenjha from different Keeps meet for the first time, they must engage in combat to test the other's skills. This fight is traditionally to submission only, though it often goes further; to first blood. It is never to the death, as this shows inability to focus and control one's Inner Fire.

Once Hadji-Mai has finished, the "loser" may not question the other's wisdom or actions. The "victor" may question the other for information, which must be freely and truthfully given. The loser can call for a rematch, but not until a year has passed, and only if they meet again. A Kestrel cannot be "summoned" to Hadji-Mai, no matter how wounded the loser's pride.



PLEN-MAI: THE RITUAL OF EYE-SCARRING

Kestrel birds possess stripes under each eye, which become more pronounced with age; this marking was adapted into one of the first rituals of the Order; to symbolize the Immature's progress towards becoming Kenjha.

When Immature Kestrels defeat a worthy opponent, their mentor scars them once under each eye. Once Kestrels have three of these marks they become Kenjha (see page 41). The opponent must be a worthy non-Kestrel — defeating peasants or commoners does not count — and the final judgement lies in the hands of the Kestrel's mentor. Giving oneself these marks is an act of fraud that's one of the most terrible crimes within the Order. Naturally, as the Kestrel becomes Kenjha and matures, it becomes increasingly difficult for a member to find a worthy opponent. This explains in part why Kestrels who possess many eye scars are difficult to find.

KENJHA-MAI: THE RITUAL OF MATURITY

Only when Kestrels become proficient in the ways of the Order will they be victorious in combat; only when they are continually victorious will they be ready to represent the Order.

When Kestrels gain three Plen scars they become Kenjha, meaning literally "Warrior." Other members then see the Kestrel as adults who are fully responsible for their own actions. They have

their own quarters, undertake assignments alone, accompany the Immature, and are expected to take part in the Hadji-Mai ritual. A Kestrel's maturity is conferred during an elaborate ritual conducted by the Keep's Dai'jan.

ENSHOD-MAI: THE RITUAL OF THE BERRY-DYE

When he stepped from the fire, the Founder's skin was burnt jet-black, and this marking was to stay with him forever, singling him out from the rest of Yas'Waillan society.

To symbolise the Founder's sacrifice, all Kenjha dye themselves black with berry-dye at least once a month, from head to toe. At this point their Plen scars show white against their black skin, adding to their imposing appearance. Different berries are used according to regional availability, so the hue of Kestrels may vary depending on their location (though a non-Kestrel would probably not be able to tell the difference).



IASHA-MAI: THE RITUAL OF TRIAL BY FIRE

The strength of a Kestrel comes from the Inner Fire. To symbolise this and help their barehanded practice of the Nine Arts, all Kestrels present within a Keep (both Kenjha and Immature) must undergo training with hot coals at least once a week. This strengthens and hardens their hands and feet, enabling them to walk barefoot upon the land and even deflect blades with their bare hands. The Shojan of the Keep oversees this ritual.

SERAPH-MAI: THE RITUAL OF THE WINGS

Kestrels with wings undergo regular strengthening exercises. While this is especially important to the practitioners of Sera'klin (see page 28), it is still vital for all Kenjha capable of flight to possess powerful wings, both to increase their flight endurance and to ensure they will not be easily crippled in combat.

Hardened Hands

As an advanced rule that GMs can use, Kestrels may do one extra point of damage in hand to hand combat due to Iasha-Mai, the Kestrels' ritual for hardening their hands. If GMs opt for this rule, it is also recommended that characters with armour above Tier 2 or characters wearing platemail armour (or anything else the GM agrees to) should also do the additional point of damage.

THE NINE ARTS

"What is an Art? Surely it is a combination of talent, skill and spiritual awareness. Without all three of these factors, there is no Art."

— Baraddhul Five-Sands, Kenjha of Al-Budozan

The Nine Arts are the unique martial skills of the Order of Kestrels. From the very first, known as Shi'klin, to the newest, named Yokosh after its founder, they are the central *raison d'être* of the Kestrels — without them, the Order simply would not exist.

In the beginning there was only Shi'klin, the Art the Fire taught the Founder upon the eponymous hills. For centuries this was the only Art. Many Yas'Wailians still believe it to be the only one, even confusing an Art as different as Su'Machao with Shi'klin.

As the Order grew from its humble beginnings, its members becoming more diverse in their assignments and abilities, so new Arts were founded and old ones discarded. It is fairly safe to assume that the current Nine Arts, though they have been the only ones in existence since the Schism, are not the only Arts that Kestrels ever practised. If, indeed, there truly are other Kestrels working in Providence, it is quite possible they use Arts long lost to the Kestrels of the free cities; they may even have developed new ones.

Each Art has its own techniques, specialisations, and philosophies. As a result most Keeps favour certain Arts over others — generally those the Shojan is the most familiar with. Some Kestrels travel between Keeps periodically to learn Arts that are not taught in their homes.

PLAYER CHARACTERS AND THE ARTS

The practice of an Art is all-encompassing and continual. Even the most experienced Kenjha practises katas long into the early hours. Over a long period of time, the philosophy of a Kestrel's primary Art will often come to influence their more mundane actions.

For example, presented with the simple, unconscious act of sitting in a tavern, several Kestrels would act in different ways. Assassins would probably find a seat near an exit, with their backs to the wall. A follower of Mai-Shan might sit somewhere near the fire, but with a pleasant view of the jungle. A practitioner of T'Chao would simply grab the nearest stool and sit down in one swift motion.

These are only examples, but players must remember them when choosing an Art to follow. It will influence their characters' actions and attitudes in subtle yet immeasurable ways.

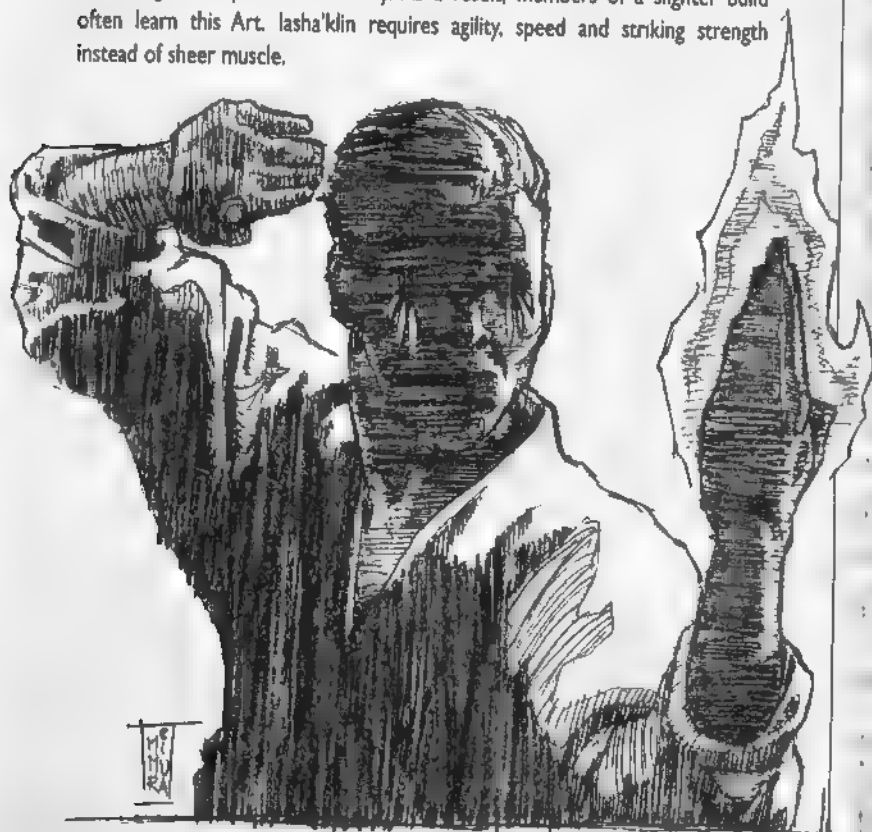
ESHO-GINJA'KLIN: WAY OF THE SHADOW-ASSASSIN

This is an ancient Art that began with the first specialist assassins of the Order. Esho-Ginja'klin teaches stealth and fluidity of movement, as well as self-preservation. Some mistakenly see this as a "sneaky" Art, but in truth it is simply cautious. Kestrel assassins rarely act on impulse, and this Art encourages them to be totally prepared and aware of their surroundings. When they do act, however, it is with lightning speed and deadly accuracy.

The ready stance of Esho-Ginja'klin is slightly crouched and tightly strung, with the arms held close to the body. Its practitioners use any and every part of their body as appropriate to each situation. They are known for the Invisible Strike, where the assassin seemingly appears out of nowhere to attack a target.

IASHA'KLIN: WAY OF THE FIRE

This Art teaches the way of the Inner Fire, the centre of a Kestrel's spiritual strength. The followers of Iasha'klin are as swift and furious as the fire that is inside them. Followers of the Art are also often Wird users, further increasing their speed and ferocity. As a result, members of a slighter build often learn this Art. Iasha'klin requires agility, speed and striking strength instead of sheer muscle.



Warriors of the Fire, as they are known, adopt a stance of fluid motion, their arms constantly moving in readiness to deal and receive blows. These Kestrels are renowned for the Wrath of Iasha, in which they unleash the power of their Inner Fire in a rapid frenzy of fist strikes.

MAI-SHAN

This is the oldest Art besides Shi'klin. Legend states that the Founder himself developed Mai-Shan in his twilight years, using his increased wisdom and knowledge of the Fire and balance of nature to compensate for his lack of youthful vigour. Mai-Shan is sometimes called the "Old Man's Art," though to do so to the face of one of its followers is extremely hazardous. It is true, though, that this Art is steeped in ritual and tradition. Its practitioners are often Kestrels who have become proficient in one or more Arts and wish to learn a more stable, spiritual style.

Their relaxed, open stance (often referred to as "The Welcoming Innkeeper"), and complete lack of tension in their bodies makes followers of Mai-Shan easily recognised. This allows them to absorb and redirect energy, as in the Turn Attack manoeuvre where a foe's force is turned back at them.

SHI'KLIN: THE WAY

This is the oldest and most popular Art, which began with the Founder and remains unchanged to this day. Shi'klin is by necessity a well-balanced Art, sometimes augmented with a little Wird but still fully effective without. Due to its sheer variety of moves it is perhaps the most rounded, though many of the more specialist Arts are more effective in a given technique.

Followers of the Way adopt a formal, wide-legged stance with their fists raised, allowing them to use both hands and feet easily. They do not have a specialist manoeuvre of their own, but instead share many with the other Arts.

SERA'KLIN: WAYS OF THE AIR – aka WINGS OF FURY

This Art is not as popular as it used to be, back when there was no question of a Kestrel being able to fly. Regardless, for those possessed of full wings, this is a formidable Art. Sera'klin followers are unabashed in their airborne glory, revelling in its speed and three-dimensional awareness. One odd development is the interest Shards with flight abilities have in this Art; although one of its manoeuvres is closed to them, many are fascinated by its unique aerial emphasis.

Furious Wings do not have a stance (how does one "stand" in the air?). Nonetheless, they are well known both for their deadly charging Swoops and unique Wing Strikes, using their wings as a weapon. When not attacking with their wings they tend to favour striking with their feet, thus keeping their wings unrestricted. On the rare occasions that they are grounded, practitioners like to keep their wings greatly outstretched.

SU'MACHAO

Many Immature Kestrels ridicule this Art, usually because they have never actually seen a Su'Machaon Warrior in action. Su'Machao is the only Art to completely embrace wrestling, and as such has little glamour among the other, flashier Arts. This Art's heavy, bulky practitioners are often as nimble as their slighter brethren; they will overcome all others in close quarters and in grappling fights. In the last few decades Su'Machao has experienced something of a resurgence in popularity, with many Kestrels learning it to augment their other, primary Art.

Su'Machaons habitually fall into a wide stance with a very low centre of gravity. Most of their moves rely on the combined strength of their body momentum and arms. They often use the Slapping Strike to disorientate their opponents, setting them up for a good old-fashioned Belt Throw.



T'CHAO: THE TYPHOON

Named after its founder, the first Shojan of Sunarius, T'Chao is an Art that emphasises speed and fury. Like Isha'klin it is often favoured by those of slight build, but the similarities end there. Rather than using the Inner Fire, T'Chao relies on the practitioners' coordination and wiry strength for its explosive bursts of energy. Most of its followers cannot use Wird, resulting in some inverse snobbery towards those who can.

T'Chao followers will adopt a long, almost sideways stance. They are often seen practising the Typhoon, a deadly whirlwind of strikes from both fists and feet.

TEKKAN

No one is quite sure where or when this Art came about: some maintain it was developed before the Exile, pointing to its similarities to Shii'klin. Others hold up its deadly Total Combination as proof that it is a modern, dynamic style which draws on all others. Whatever the case, no one would deny that it is effective.

Generally practised by heavy, bulky Kestrels, its low, powerful style is almost entirely ground based: as a result its ready stance is also low and steady. Tekkan's followers tend to favour attacking with their feet, especially when using the fabled Total Combination manoeuvre. This move alone is reason enough to respect this Art, whatever its origins.



YOKOSH

This Art is named after Sind'ila Yokosh, the reformer who reunited the Order after the Schism. Yokosh was a Wird user and the Art reflects this aspect. People versed in Wird almost exclusively practice the Yokosh Art. This is not a fixed rule; anyone may learn the Art, Wird user or not. However tradition, coupled with the fact that Yokosh is very difficult to master, has brought this about.

The normal Yokosh stance is high and long, with the hands weaving intricate patterns in the air as they spin and dance in a whirlwind-like manner. This often serves well as a distraction. Practitioners attack with their feet nearly all of the time, as in the multiple kicking strikes of the Spinning Hurricane.

WIRD

PHILOSOPHY

The Sacred Fire taught the Founder the ways of Wird. A replica of the Fire burns at the centre of every Keep in Providence. Since air fuels fire, these are the two elements all Kestrels are most attuned to.

To a Kestrel, Wird is at once an all-permeating force, a mighty weapon and a good friend. It is an irresistible force and Kestrels use it with respect.

Millennia ago, those Wird users who joined the Order developed a style of Wird use that focused on enhancing the physical attributes of the caster. This developed into a form of casting that gradually became more diverse. However, after the Schism, many of the original spells were lost. Many of the spells the Kestrels use now have been developed since.

There are many similarities between Kestrel Wird users and Wird Dancers. Both use movement as an inherent part of their spell-casting rituals, and they are both far more internal than other forms of Wird casting. In fact, some of the Kestrels have managed to adapt Wird Dancer spells to their own use. These Wird users were Kestrels first, and many spells were discarded as irrelevant to the Order. Furthermore, the philosophies of a Kestrel and a Wird Dancer, while sharing some similarities, are at heart very different.

Today Kestrels who learn Wird learn a very specific set of spells. Their use in combat is always emphasised. This has resulted in many high-level Kestrel Wird users unable to accomplish simple things other Wird users can. In part, this is because they view them as contrary to the philosophy of the Order, which pushes making the Kestrel more capable as opposed to making the environment more hospitable.

Nevertheless, Wird is taught to all who are capable of using it within the Order of Kestrels — there is no snobbery regarding who may or may not use Wird, even including the few Fallen who join the Order.

Teaching the Fallen Wird is illegal in the Alliance of Kings. The Keeps that teach them within the Alliance are not public about it. The Fallen who do learn Wird are encouraged to use it in subtle ways. This practice is more commonplace in the Merchant Bands' cities of Haak San Bazaa and Bastion, where it is legal due to the abolition of the caste system.

The Alliance of Kings suspects the Order of teaching Wird to Fallen members. This has resulted in some hostility from those nobles who still believe Wird is only for the rulers. But the Kestrels' potential usefulness to the Alliance is enough to ensure their suspicions are voiced only quietly, if at all.

SHARDS

Shortly after the Lost Wars, during which mass Epiphanies took place, the Order decided to allow Shards to become Kenjha. There are now almost 500 Shard Kestrels in Providence, each of them utterly unique.

Much of a Shard's training will fall to the responsibilities of a Dai'jan, though they still learn the Nine Arts in the normal way. The Dai'jan's task is to help Shards hone their unique Abilities in such a way that will maximise their potential when in combat. Although Dai'jans must by definition be Wird users rather than Shards, they are in a better position than most to understand the special nature of a Shard's powers. Many Shards develop a very close relationship with their Dai'jan.

WIRD USERS

All Kestrels who become full-fledged Wird users strive to perfect the art of moving with Wird to outmanoeuvre and outwit their opponents. In some Keeps, the Dai'jan is held in more respect than even the Shojan.

The Kestrels have almost perfected the art of combining Wird with martial prowess, incorporating many Wird enchantments, spells and rituals into their arts. Even those who do not or cannot use Wird benefit from this teaching; many of the almost superhuman Combat Manoeuvres of the different Kestrel martial arts rely on a kind of "mundane" channelling of Wird. In this case, Kestrels harness the power inherent in all things to work in favour of those who perform the correct physical motions. Many non-Kestrels see this as either superstitious ritual or blind luck, but none doubt that it works, whatever the reason.

CHAPTER FOUR

ORGANIZATION

"Though we are separated in space, our hearts and minds are one. When one Kestrel calls, all shall answer."

— extract from Kenjha-Mai

No organization survives for seven millennia without becoming structured, and that of the Kestrels is both complex and very simple at the same time. The Order of Kestrels, like so many others, has its own internal politics to deal with. The inner workings of the Kestrels often resemble more a royal court than a monastic order of spiritualists.

As stated previously, all Kestrels are devoted to the Order above all things. They bicker and fight while power struggles threaten the stability of Keeps. In addition, members of the Order fear and mistrust the Gath Hadatchi. Nonetheless, should the outside world pose any manner of threat, all Kestrels will stand united against a common enemy.

For outsiders and most Kenjha to know the Order of Kestrels completely is impossible — it is simply too big, both in members and geography, for this task. It is however, possible to gain knowledge of the overall shape of the Order; this chapter explores its organization.

Herein you will find details of the power structure within the Order: how the Kestrels operate from day-to-day, how Kenjha go about obtaining work, and how the Order recruits new members. Chapter 5 deals with differences between Keeps within Providence.

HIERARCHY

"Do not question the wisdom of the Trian, O Shojan."

— unidentified Gath Hadatchi

Within the Order there are three ranks: Trian, Quartermaster and Kenjha. Immature Kestrels effectively have no rank, and the Gath Hadatchi are a group, not a ranking.

THE TRIAN

DUTIES

Above all others in the Order stand the members of the Trian. These three anonymous rulers have the final word on all things within the Order, though they do not generally involve themselves in the day-to-day business of Keeps, at least, not publicly.

The Trian is responsible for the spiritual wellbeing of the Order, and make decisions that affect the Order as a whole. When the Trian passes an edict, it dispatches Gath Hadatchi to each and every Keep within Providence to inform the Shojan of the ruling. This also includes the appointment of Quartermasters within Keeps, on which the Trian once again has the final decision.

No one, except the Gath Hadatchi, is aware of where the Trian resides, though some evidence suggests it is somewhere on Mount Aikodon. All communication with the members is relayed via the masked Kenjha. If a message needs to be relayed to the Trian in the first instance, all Dai'jan know a spell that will call a Gath Hadatchi to the Keep.

The Trian is also the Order's historian. In its books lies the Order's every decision and course of action, in addition to a wealth of knowledge regarding the world at large. Although in theory the Trian's knowledge should be accurate, in truth the information is often incomplete. Any fact from more than five centuries ago is based only on oral history and dim memory. As well, the Trian's information is only available to its leaders, often resulting in decisions which others in the Order find difficult to rationalise or understand.

APPOINTMENT

The Trian is elected from the ranks of the Quartermasters at a meeting, known as a Baik'sho, convened whenever necessary. As the position is a lifelong one, this session does not occur too often, and many Quartermasters will only see one or two Baik'sho in their lives.

The Baik'sho takes the form of a pilgrimage to a remote place within Providence, different each time, where all Quartermasters meet and vote. The Trian is not present; the Gath Hadatchi serve as its emissaries, and enjoy all respect due to their masters for the duration.

The ballot is a secret one; in this way, the identity of the newest member of the Trian is known only to the other members of the Trian, the Gath Hadatchi, and any others who notice that one of their Quartermasters has suddenly disappeared.

Quartermasters are generally elected to be Trian on the basis of three factors: experience, wisdom and respect. The position is too powerful and too important to the Order to be bogged down in politics.

The Baik'sho is still a breeding ground for interaction and politics, however, as many Quartermasters arrive at different times, yet may not vote until all the others are present. Many alliances between two Keeps are made at a Baik'sho.

Once the voting is completed, the Quartermasters return to their tents as the Gath Hadatchi count the votes; any candidate who has more than 50 percent of the votes wins the position. If no Quartermaster has achieved this level of confidence, the position goes to any who has at least 50 percent more votes than their nearest rival. If still no member of the Trian meets these criteria, the Gath Hadatchi redo the ballot the next day.

This process could potentially extend for days or weeks, as a new Trian member must be elected before anyone may leave. This rarely occurs, as candidates begin currying favour from other Quartermasters long before the Baik'sho has been active that long. The most charismatic person usually wins the position.

Finally, when they select a new leader, Quartermasters announce the result, and all Quartermasters must remain in their tents until otherwise noted. The Gath Hadatchi then takes the new leader; the journey to the home of the Trian begins immediately. Eventually, the Baik'sho is declared over and all Quartermasters step out of their tents and return to their Keeps.

Obviously, some Kestrels will realize who the new member of the triumvirate is; their former Quartermaster within their keep, for example. Still, all Kestrels are sworn to utter secrecy regarding the Trian. Revealing the identity of one is the highest crime possible within the Order, and results in the new Trian member's ritual suicide. This also results in the Gath Hadatchi's Inquisition. Their task is simple: find the individual responsible for the betrayal. The Gath Hadatchi do not rest until the traitor lies dead.

POLITICS

There is one rumour regarding the Trian that refuses to die, and its secretive nature does not help to dispel it. It claims that there is no Trian. There are no "three wise men" at the head of the Order. Instead, there is only the Gath Hadatchi, pretending they serve a higher authority in order to quell any dissent because of their actions. Anyone elected at a Baik'sho is actually taken into the ranks of the Gath Hadatchi and taught their secret arts.

This rumour is especially strong. The fact that no one ever sees the leaders feeds this belief, as all the Trian's orders are relayed through the Gath Hadatchi. Intriguing though this rumour may be, it has one caveat; if the Gath Hadatchi really are the final authority within the Order, who then leads the Gath Hadatchi?

THE GATH HADATCHI

DUTIES

The Gath Hadatchi have only one duty: to serve and protect the Trian at any cost. Their loyalty is total.

Gath Hadatchi, or "masked ones" as many refer to them, are not recruited in the normal manner of Kestrels. The position of Gath Hadatchi is mostly hereditary, as future members are raised completely within the communal society of the Gath Hadatchi with a singular purpose.

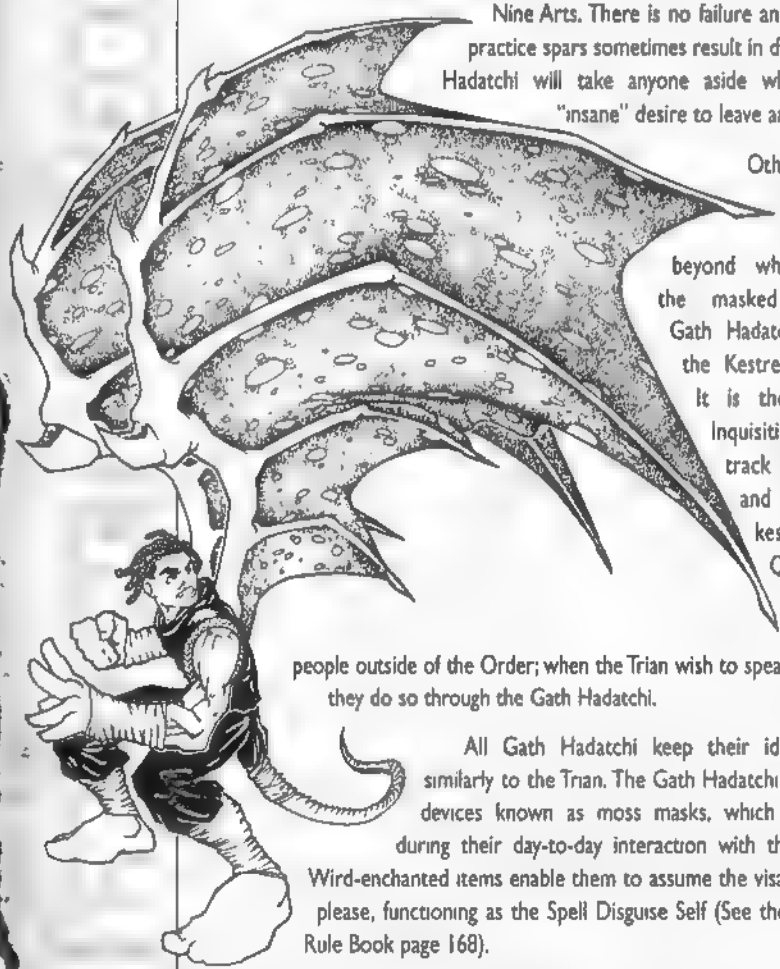
Any Gath Hadatchi who bears a child must give the infant over or face the death of both the baby and themselves. Gath Hadatchi also take children from the families of other Kestrels, and as a last resort from others outside the Order altogether — sometimes for a hefty sum, sometimes under threat.

To be a Gath Hadatchi is to devote one's entire life to the mastery of the Nine Arts. There is no failure and no turning back; practice spars sometimes result in death, and the Gath Hadatchi will take anyone aside who expresses the "insane" desire to leave and execute them.

Other Kestrels know almost nothing of the Gath Hadatchi beyond what they see of the masked warriors. The Gath Hadatchi are effectively the Kestrels' private police. It is they who conduct Inquisitions on traitors, track down Yinsha'jan and discipline senior kestrels, including Quartermasters. They also function as emissaries to

people outside of the Order; when the Trian wish to speak to a non-Kestrel, they do so through the Gath Hadatchi.

All Gath Hadatchi keep their identities a secret, similarly to the Trian. The Gath Hadatchi, however, possess devices known as moss masks, which make this easier during their day-to-day interaction with the Kestrels. These Wird-enchanted items enable them to assume the visage of anyone they please, functioning as the Spell Disguise Self (See the Providence Main Rule Book page 168).



The Gath Hadatchi do not practice Enshod-Mai; there is no need when interacting with other Kestrels, and it would only restrict them in their dealings with the rest of society.

POLITICS

There is much paranoia within Kestrel ranks regarding the Gath Hadatchi. As the Gath Hadatchi are acting directly on the orders of the Trian, they have absolute authority over all others in the Order. Their use of Moss Masks has also led to some suppositions that many Gath Hadatchi are active "undercover" within the Keeps of Providence.

Many of the Order's members believe that the Gath Hadatchi practice their own, unique Arts; some believe them to be capable of wielding awesome Wlrd powers, and a few even whisper they may be Blight Crows.

Gath Hadatchi are the most loyal and deadly weapon the Trian possesses. They are also an effective political tool, furthering the hidden machinations of the Trian both within the Order and without — by any means necessary.

THE QUARTERMASTERS

DUTIES

Though the Trian (and, by association, the Gath Hadatchi), is the highest authority within the Order of Kestrels, it is the Quartermasters who carry out their orders and enforce the Order's laws within their Keeps. Every keep within Providence has three Quartermasters (Cry-Star is an unusual case that will be dealt with in chapter 5).

SHOJAN

First, there is the Shojan, or Head Quartermaster. The Shojan is in charge of the Keep and all Kestrels within it. Thus, by definition, Shojans are in command of all Kestrels within a city. A Shojan's jurisdiction extends to the accepted boundaries of the city, but not beyond. Any Kestrels under their command, however, remains so even if they leave the city. Not until they reach another Keep and present themselves to the Shojan there will they come under the other's jurisdiction.

Commanding a city of Kestrels is no mean task, and the position of Shojan is not for the faint of heart. In organizing a small army of warriors (Cliff-Spider has up to 1,000 at any one time, for example), the Shojan is responsible for dispensing or approving assignments for each and every member. The only exceptions are those who fall under the command of the Ginjan (see below). Even then, the Ginjan and Shojan are in constant communication to coordinate the work of the Order.

The Shojan also heads the senior group of Kenjha, called Kenjho ("Warrior Master"), who teach the Nine Arts to others within the Keep. Though these "coaches" are not of a higher rank than other Kenjha, the Shojan hand picks them for their abilities, wisdom and experience. The use of Kenjho enables Shojans to free up time they would otherwise spend training hundreds of Kenjha. Still, they are responsible for coordinating the teachings of the Kenjho.

The Shojan also teaches medicine within the Keep, taking up to ten hours a week. Kenjha are taught medicine on a rotational basis, to keep the numbers in classes down at any one time. This also means that the Shojan is constantly teaching, as one class ends and another begins.

All grievances within the Keep fall at the feet of the Shojan. Once a week the Shojan holds a court, known as Yanza'sho, in the central compound. For half the day they hear all complaints, suggestions, recommendations and so on from their Kenjha. Immature Kestrels do not attend the Yanza'sho.

Shojans are each Keep's ambassadors within cities; they handle diplomatic matters that do not fall under the domain of the Triar. Thus, it is vital a Shojan be familiar with the workings of court and its etiquette. Many Shojans attempt to forge a friendship with the ruler of their cities, and a fair few succeed. Though this is beneficial to the Keep, it is a drain on their time.

As if this were not enough, the Shojan also organizes the acquisition of supplies for the Keep. Here again though, they have aid in the form of Kenjha who have shown themselves to have an aptitude for domestic matters, known as Ken-Doyjha ("Warriors of the hearth").

As can be seen, the position of Shojan is an exhausting one. Some find it easier to cope than others, and thrive on the pressure they find themselves under. Others surround themselves with Kenjho and Ken-Doyjha, leaving many of the less vital decisions to their subordinates. No one method of rule is correct; different Keeps will work equally well under the completely varied methods of Shojans.

DAI'JAN

Next to the Shojan stands the Dai'jan, or Coloured Quartermaster. The Dai'jan, who is always a Wird user, is in charge of all things related to Wird within the Keep. Many Shojans are themselves Wird users, but the organisation of Wird training is left to their Dai'jans. It is important to recognise that the Dai'jans, for all their responsibilities, are still subordinate to the Shojans; many Shojans will listen to the advice of Dai'jans carefully, but the Shojan is still the final authority.

First and foremost, the Dai'jan teaches Wird to all Kenjha who can learn. This is their most important duty, and takes up the greatest portion of their time. In addition, it is the Dai'jan's responsibility to recognize those who can become full Wird users in their own right and guide them on the correct path.

The training of Shards also falls to the Dai'jan in many respects. Though the Dai'jan cannot teach them Wird, they are perhaps best equipped to understand the nature of the Epiphany, and so often help Shards to harness their Abilities to their full potential.

The Dai'jan is also the spiritual guide for all within the Keep, tending to the Sacred Fire that burns at its centre and conducting many of the Order's rituals. Whereas Kestrels with a grievance call on the Shojan, in times of spiritual need they consult the Dai'jan.

Each Dai'jan is recognised by a colour, and this is also the colour of the Keep (Cliff-Spider, for example, has the Red Dai'jan — therefore Sunarius Keep is also known as the Red Keep). No one is quite sure which came first, the Dai'jan or the Keep, but the colour is now geographically static. Thus, new Dai'jans inherit the colour of their predecessors. This colour is then used to identify all Kestrels from the Keep by the colour of the Seal they wear (see chapter 5).

GINJAN

Finally there is the Ginjan, or Secret Quartermaster, who is in charge of assassins within each Keep. The Ginjan's title is not whimsical — officially, they do not exist. The Order has always denied it employs or trains assassins, and the majority of the populace believe this to be the case.

But people in power, who require a swift, expedient dispatch of an enemy, do not hesitate to call on the redoubtable — and expensive — resources of the Ginjan. These employers also honour the Order's wishes by keeping their existence a secret. Any who do not would likely find themselves a viable target, though this has thankfully not yet been put to the test.

Like the Dai'jan, the Ginjan's area of concern is quite specific, and final authority, even over the assassins, lies with the Shojan. Nevertheless, Ginjans enjoy a certain amount of autonomy within the Keep. It is their task to coordinate the assignments of all their Kenjha, ensuring their tasks do not conflict with others currently undertaken by the Order. In a Keep with a large assassin contingent, such as Haak San Bazaa, this means the Ginjan is constantly keeping the duties of fifty assassins in mind at once.

Ginjan also train their assassins in the ways of their particular profession; this is a very specialized task. To this end, almost all Ginjan are masters of Esho-Ginja'klin.

It is protocol that no assassin can attack a target who has a Kestrel guard, a formality designed to prevent internal conflicts within the Order. This occasionally

rankles both the Ginjan and his assassins, often resulting in delaying attacks until a target moves out of the city and/or dispenses with the Kestrel guard. It also not unknown for a Kestrel guard to be suddenly reassigned so that assassins may do their work.

This means that many assassins operate outside of the city, and must be familiar both with the ins and outs of their home city and the world at large. When assassins arrive in a city from another Keep, following a target, they must report to the local Ginjan first. The Ginjan then decides the best way to coordinate their task; if the target has a Kestrel guard within the city, the assassin is ordered to wait until they move on or the guard is reassigned.

The Ginjan's task is in some ways more stressful than the Shojan's. They must often deal with assassins demanding to know why they cannot accept an assignment while simultaneously bowing to the wishes of the Shojan.

APPOINTMENT

In theory, the Trian appoints all Quartermasters by personal endorsement. In reality, most Quartermasters elect "heirs" to their positions from their most trusted Kenjha: when their ascendancy comes, any problems will have been hammered out long ago and their appointment is simply a matter of protocol.

The Quartermasters contact the Gath Hadatchi and they make a request to appoint the decided Kenjha. This request is then relayed to the Trian, and the Gath Hadatchi return with their decision. In the great

majority of cases the Trian gives the required consent, and by the time Gath



Hadatchi have relayed back and forth, the new Quartermaster has already been in office for weeks, sometimes months.

The Trian does have the power to appoint whomever it sees fit as Quartermaster, including someone not already of the Keep. It can even force existing Quartermasters to step down from their positions. This is an extremely rare occasion, for two reasons: first, it generally causes internal strife within the Keep; and second, the Trian cannot possibly know every Kenjha by reputation alone. More often than not, the consent of the other Quartermasters is recommendation enough.

POLITICS

Between Keeps, some Quartermasters are in constant competition, vying both to increase their chances of becoming Trian and to further the favour of their Keep above others. Sharonjit, Shojan of Haak San Bazaa, is a particularly fierce player of the game. Her political skills have significantly increased the standing of the Al-Budozan Keep over others in Providence. In time it may even come to challenge Cliff-Spider's reputation.

KENJHA

DUTIES

Every Kenjha is a soldier first and a spiritualist second; in both cases, their duty lies to the Order above all things.

Each Kestrel is unique, but all have similar responsibilities. The Kenjha make up the vast majority of Kestrels, and are those the common populace will have the most contact with. Each of them, therefore, act as ambassadors for the Order, and must carry out their assignments with an exemplary sense of duty, purpose and loyalty. A Kenjha's misdeed will not go unreported, and those members who bring shame on the order face the possibility of being branded Yinsha'jan.

The reasoning for such behaviour stems from the Order's need to maintain its reputation. Without the distinction they enjoy among their employers, Kestrels could not demand high prices; because they do require a large expense, their employers expect them to be the best.

Due to the high prices Kestrels demand, most Yas'Wailians can only afford to employ a Kestrel for specific purposes: a noble may require a bodyguard for troubled times in court, a merchant may wish a number of Kestrels to act as defenders of his caravan for a specific journey, and so on. Only members of the higher nobility — rulers and lords — can afford a permanent retainer of Kestrels.

Many Kenjha will switch employers frequently, often working for two opposed factions within a short space of time. Here again the Order's need for a spotless reputation is evident, as Quartermasters must assure their employers that their guards are not still in the pocket of their enemies, for example.

It is also worth noting that an "ordinary" Kenjha is not a mercenary. Except for the Ginjan's students, one cannot employ a Kestrel to attack an enemy, or to directly provoke conflict. Their role is that of a defender. Make no mistake, however, that should their charge be endangered, Kestrels will defend them with their lives.

Kenjha also have a duty to be mentors to those Immature Kestrels who seek to become Kenjha. This often leads them to accompany bands of up to three Immature as they undertake their first assignments. The Kenjha's task here is to guide the young ones, answering their queries as best they can, advising them on protocol and duties, and aiding them in the successful completion of their assignments.

It is not unusual for a Kenjha to "adopt" one or more Immature Kestrels for some time, accompanying them on several occasions. On the one hand this is beneficial to the Immature, as they can see how one Kenjha responds to different situations. Unfortunately, there is also the danger that the young warriors will not see beyond the "style" of their mentors, and become blinded. This is countered by deliberately having a Kenjha who practises different styles from their mentors' accompany the Immature occasionally, as a way of broadening their views and methods.

Within the Keep, the life of a Kenjha is less dangerous, if not especially less busy. All Kenjha are responsible for their own maintenance as warriors, and most of a Kenjha's time within the Keep is spent training.

In addition, many Kenjha have other, less important duties. As mentioned before, the Kenjho, though still practising warriors, will assist the Shojan as best they can. It is not uncommon for Quartermasters to delegate responsibilities to them. Also, many other experienced Kenjha will aid with the training of bands of Immature, especially in an art they themselves practice.

The Ken-Doyjha, too, are not the only "housekeepers" within the Order, and many others take on small duties such as cleaning or cooking when they are not on assignments.

Among the Kenjha there is a strong sense of community and camaraderie, and the kinship of the Order enhances this aspect. One Kenjha will never criticise another to anyone outside of the Order, as a united front is necessary to maintain their loyal reputation.

It is true, though, that as part of their training Kestrels are encouraged to be independent and self-reliant; the late-night conversations Kenjha will have

over a glass of wine are legendary. An equally important part of the training of Kenjha teaches them to understand Yas'Wailians' lack of complete knowledge, that which is only available to the elements and gods. As a result, most Kenjha remain open-minded and are content to agree to disagree. However heated their debates, they rarely come to blows.

APPOINTMENT

The appointment of a Kenjha occurs only when an Immature Kestrel has gained three Plen scars. Then the ritual of Kenjha-Mai is conducted, always at night, and from the next morning onwards the new Kenjha is expected to live as the others.

Becoming Kenjho or Ken-Doyjha is more a matter of time; there is no set rule for the appointment of these roles, as it is always optional at the whim of the Shojan. Thus the Shojan appoints them when it is necessary and deserved.

POLITICS

Kenjha enjoy a great reputation throughout Providence. People regard them as some of the best and most loyal warriors in the land, and as such are generally respected wherever they go. Those of the lower castes, in particular, often fall silent in their presence and clear paths for them. This is not to say that many of the lower castes like, or even trust, Kestrels, but they know better than to antagonise them.

This is indicative of how most people see the Kestrels, and especially the Kenjha. A Kestrel bodyguard is an expensive but effective commodity throughout Providence. In short, people think twice before becoming involved with a Kestrel, especially if they have ever witnessed an Hadji-Mai, the respect ritual.

Because of their work, Kenjha are also party to much of what goes on in the political world of Providence, being as close as they are to the intrigue and conspiracies. Though they dare not become involved, other than the pledge to protect their charges, be sure that they pass along any secrets they learn to others in the Order. This shared knowledge also explains the high standing of Shojans within their city.

THE IMMATURE

Immature Kestrels are caught between two ideals: while they are expected to act as full Kenjha, and accept their duties as any Kenjha would, they are accorded almost none of the status or rights of a warrior.

In a way this dilemma is as good a trial as any for weeding out unsuitable Kestrels, as it places a potentially frustrating situation at their feet. Those who accept this keep their eyes on the privileges granted them when they mature. In this case, they are already halfway to becoming Kenjha.

The Immature must live in shared dormitories; a mentor Kenjha always accompanies them on assignments. This Kenjha also receives their payment. The Immature are not permitted to venture outside the Keep without the permission of the Shojan, and even then a Kenjha chaperons them; they must always accede to the wishes of a Kenjha.

Yet in all of this Immature Kestrels must also behave as Kenjha, and train twice as often — and twice as diligently — as their mature brethren. Truly the trials of the Immature are formidable.

Competition among the Immature is fierce. The struggle to achieve the position of Kenjha and the precious Plen scars, is everything to a young Kestrel. Many are the hotheaded young warriors who have met their downfall through blind ambition, whether at the hands of the outside world or their own brethren.

This pressure also creates a bond between the Immature, and the young Kestrels are often more sociable than full Kenjha. Their strength lies in numbers; thus, they often undertake assignments in threes, generally the students they share dormitories with. In this way the Immature can rely on one another for support. The best friends of Kenjha within the order are those they spent their Immature years with, exchanging heroic tales of long-dead Kestrel heroes over the night's fire.

APPOINTMENT

There are two common methods of selecting new Immature throughout Providence. Some Keeps stuck rigidly to one method; others use a combination of the two.

The first, and most common, is that of an annual "open day" for all young applicants and their parents who wish them to become Kestrels. Once a year, the Keep opens its gates to the public for a day of presentation. Anyone is welcome, and none, not even Fallen, are immediately turned away.

Merchants are invited, and the day's events begin with trading, socialising and finally, friendly sparring between the young would-be warriors. This sparring is in no way official. The Kenjho encourages it in order to weed out those applicants whose hearts are not in it. Sure enough, it is not uncommon to find only half of the original participants remaining at the end of the day.

At nightfall, the traders pack up and the Quartermasters ask the guardians of the youngsters still involved to leave and return in the morning.

After their departure, the real selection process begins. Throughout the night the Shojan, Dai'jan, Ginjan (incognito, of course) and Kenjho oversee a systematic series of sparring matches between the young applicants. These exercises are designed to weed out the less skilful youngsters. The numbers obviously differ from

Keep to Keep, according to how many Immature they can take in any one year. Sunarius Keep, for example, begins the night with as many as two to three hundred eager youngsters and ends when there are only a handful left.

Shards are a different case from non-Shards, and in these instances they are paired off wherever possible. If this is not practical, the Dai'jan will often spar with the Shards themselves, testing each one's abilities.

The sparring goes on through the night, sometimes continuing until well into the next day. During this time none present, whether Kestrel or applicant, may sleep or take refreshment other than water.

Finally, when the selection is complete, the guardians of the youngsters are allowed into the Keep, to reclaim those who were unsuccessful or bid a tearful farewell to those who were.

The second method of selection, and the one Shards most commonly employ, is that of an application. This is simply a matter of requesting an audience with the Shojan and stating one's case. This application process is often more difficult from the applicant's view than an open day.

First, gaining an audience with the Shojan is no easy task. Second, a Shojan can and does often summarily dismiss these applicants almost immediately. Even should the Shojan deign to listen, in the absence of other applicants these would-be Kestrels must fight one of the Keep's Kenjho to prove their skills (Shards fight the Dai'jan). For a Shard this is perhaps not so daunting a task, but for a young child it requires as much nerve as skill.

Victory in this bout is not necessary, and certainly not expected! Nonetheless, the applicants must sufficiently impress both their opponents and the Shojan with their skills.

Although in theory anyone may become a Kestrel, this is not generally true in practice. As they serve the upper three castes in society, most Kestrels are Pure, Blessed, or at least Fortuned — if only because the majority of their clients can fly!

Thus the most successful Kestrels are generally those of the Pure or Blessed caste, and those from Troupials Dove, Dragon, Eagle, Gargoyle and Hawk tend to stand out. Troupial Bat is also renowned for producing good assassins.

This often discourages other Troupials and castes to join the Order. Be sure, though, that those few Fallen who have become Kestrels are often more fearsome than their Pure or Blessed comrades.

POLITICS

Politics among the Immature does not usually occur — most are simply too naive and insecure. Nonetheless, gossip among students is rife and word spreads quickly. It is a truism that there are few secrets among the Immature.

YINSHA'JAN

The Yinsha'jan ("Rogues") are not part of the official hierarchy of the Order of Kestrels. They are the Kenjha who somehow rebelled against the dictum of the Order and now live as mercenaries. The Order also discharges Kenjha and labels them Yinsha'jan. Their transgressions range from the serious crime of faking Plen scars to misdemeanours such as continuously refusing to take part in a ritual.

A jury composed of a Keep's Quartermasters try all Kenjha who commit crimes that are not serious enough to call for an Inquisition. The Quartermasters will hear the evidence in secret; if the jury finds the accused guilty beyond repair, then they brand them Yinsha'jan.

Yinsha'jan have little authority within Providence. They have been stripped of their affiliation and are hated by all Kenjha. Many nobles will not employ one for fear of offending members of the Order, and Kenjha have no compunction in fighting a rogue as part of their duty. In addition, should a Gath Hadatchi and Yinsha'jan ever meet, the Gath Hadatchi is honour-bound to kill the Yinsha'jan if possible.

Many Yinsha'jan find employ in other ways, often hiring themselves out to the lower castes for small sums or payment. They also find work as mercenaries, especially in the wilder regions of Providence out toward the Sunderlands.

The life of a Yinsha'jan is a lonely one. They are both feared and hated at the same time, but many would have it no other way. These warriors are often contemptuous of protocol and etiquette, seeing themselves as the epitome of the free-spirited warrior and righteous in their own way.



FORMS OF ADDRESS

"Your will is mine, O Shojan."

— anonymous Kenjha

Within the Order of Kestrels there are rules of etiquette besides the simple act of obeying orders. The main act is that of proper address.

When Kestrels address or speak about or to one of higher rank, the title holder is prefixed with "O," literally meaning "Holy." Thus a Kenjha would address his Quartermaster as "O Shojan," while anyone other than the Trian would address the Order's emissaries as "O Gath Hadatchi."

Generally Kestrels refer to their titles as both singular and plural, so Kenjha means either "Warrior" or "Warriors," depending on the context. Similarly, members of the Trian are known as "a Trian," "one of the Trian," or simply "Trian." Any Kestrel would address such a person as "O Trian."

OBTAINING WORK

"Three thousand Natlaw Tasks! I am asking you to guard my person, not kill your children! Begone!"

— Jiral Cardoum, of King Gunther's court, assassinated a week later

The Kenjha's assignments are many and their acquisition is simple.

First, a potential employer can request their employment. Those who have employed Kestrels previously will often ask the same Kenjha to work for them again; otherwise, employers can simply send messages to the Shojan detailing their needs.

Kenjha are also free to seek their own employment, and many do, targeting specific (often wealthy) individuals or groups whom they believe would wish to employ them.

Kenjha name their own price. Employers may first name a price they wish to pay, or ask Kestrels how much their employ will cost. In either case, payment is often haggled over, though not to an extreme degree. Neither side will wish to give the impression that money is that important to them, for their own reasons.

One thing Kenjha may not do, however, is accept an assignment on the spot — all work must gain the consent of the Shojan first. This is more a matter of tradition than anything, but Kenjha still observe it. Rare indeed is the Shojan who denies a reasonable request of work.

If an employer has made a request for a specific Kenjha directly to the Shojan, the Shojan either agrees or not. This varies according to whether the Kenjha is currently free and if the Shojan feels the task is one worthy of attention.

If no Kenjha is specified, the task becomes a little more troublesome, as the Shojan must decide who is best fitted for the assignment. This can often lead to resentment among Kenjha who are not selected, especially if the work is prestigious or well paid. Finally, Kenjha who have obtained a work request must first ask the Shojan's permission to undertake the task.

As noted above, assignments are almost always taken. After all, only those who can afford the price of a Kestrel would ask to begin with.

PAYMENT

"Only the Kestrels would consider a tax of thirty per cent on those for whom they provide neither shelter or food reasonable."

— Thular Gondrin, Raven Historian

Different assignments and employers will call for different methods of payment; some will pay by the day, some by the week, some even agreeing to a total fee once the task is completed.

Whatever the arrangements, one thing remains constant: payment is always in multiples of three, in accordance with Tria'sha. Whether this be three hundred, three thousand or twelve thousand matters not — the fee must be divisible by three.

Upon payment the Kenjha pay a portion of their fee to the Keep. This is either a third or a half, depending on whether they lodge in the Keep or not (see Chapter 5). There is no haggling, no bargaining and certainly no disagreement over this; it is the law. When they were Immature, the Keep provided them with everything; it is only fitting that they repay them for this as Kenjha. It has been this way for as long as anyone can remember, and Kestrels will continue to respect this tradition.

CHAPTER FIVE

HABITAT

"We inhabit a world which was not made for us; on Providence, we must tread lightly and respect the land. Already we begin to see our downfall as the world rebels against our heavy-handed presence."

— Nirus, Shojan of Shansar-Mao

Though the Kestrels are not mercenaries, their lives are comparable. When on assignments, they are often away from the Keep for long periods, working frantically. When they are between duties, they spend their time at the Keep meditating, training, and awaiting their next assignments. One of the reasons they charge such a high price, besides the tithe they must pay to the Keep, is that they need to be able to support themselves during the lax times.

Some Kestrels do not reside at the Keep, choosing instead to live alone or with their families, like normal members of society. However, this is rare, not because the Order frowns upon it, but simply because many Kestrels find themselves uncomfortable in society once they have spent their formative years within a Keep. Emissaries of the Shojan regularly visit those Kestrels who choose to live outside the Keep to ensure they still adhere to the Order's precepts.

In this chapter you will find details on the Kestrels' typical daily life; their environment, routines, and the more general aspects of life within the Order. Later, you will find an overview of the different Keeps within Providence; this includes their history, their leaders and philosophies, and their current relations with their surrounding cities. Finally, Cliff-Spider's Sunarias Keep, the oldest and largest Keep within Providence, is covered in greater detail.

DAILY ROUTINES

"It is in the simple things that one finds peace. Our work allows us the benefit of contrast, so that we may appreciate these things all the more. Of course, it also brings us the means to find time to enjoy our lives."

— Brinnur Tranbillan, Dai'jan of Domeka

There are a number of normal routines Kestrels will undertake while they are present within the Keep. Working Kestrels should still attend the rituals of Enshod-Mai and Iasha-Mai (plus Seraph-Mai if applicable), but only if it does not interfere with their assignments. Non-attendance of these rituals without adequate reason will result in disciplinary action, possibly even exile.

DAILY

Early every morning, a gong is sounded within each Order's Keep. This is the signal for all Kestrels to rise. The Dai'jan's leading of the half-hour of communal meditation in the central courtyard immediately follows.

After this initial ritual, Kestrels eat breakfast in the Keep's main hall. The Kestrels' first meal is normally a simple but substantial affair consisting of beans, gruel, vegetables and a little meat — enough to amply see them through the first half of the day.

For the rest of the morning the Kenjha and Immature begin training while the Ken-Doyjha go about their housekeeping duties. The exercises vary from day to day, but mainly consist of practising techniques or learning new ones.

At midday another, shorter, communal meditation is held, followed by a short rest and relaxation period; this is also the time when the Shojan (or one of his Kenjho) receives emissaries and visitors.

In the afternoon, practice continues apace, this time including the participation of the Ken-Doyjha. Afternoon practises are normally more vigorous than the morning's, often including sparring and group exercises.

In the late afternoon, the Quartermasters give an hour of rest to all Kestrels before the evening meal. Some spend this time in further meditation, others perform any required domestic duties or chores, and many simply socialize.

The evening meal is smaller, though more tasteful than breakfast, often including poultry or fish. Following this meal, studies are engaged; the Shojan teaches medicine or advanced combat techniques, the Dai'jan lectures philosophy or history, and the Ginjan's students learn of the more subtle, social aspects of their art. During this time, Kenjha can study alone if they wish, be it a textual study or a practice of katas.

Finally, an hour before nightfall, another communal meditation is held in the courtyard, once again overseen by the Dai'jan. Another gong is sounded to signal nightfall and an end to the meditation, and all Kestrels retire to bed. At this point some Kenjha, and even Immature, opt to continue practising katas or Wurd; this is acceptable, so long as they do not disturb those sleeping and it does not hinder their performance during the normal day as a result.

WEEKLY

Once a week, the Shojan oversees the Iasha-Mai, which replaces the evening communal meditation. Seraph-Mai is also conducted once a week, two days after Iasha-Mai. Those not practising Seraph-Mai (i.e. without wings) engage in the normal meditation.

The Shojan's court, called Yanza'sho, is also held weekly in the courtyard; the morning after Iasha-Mai is conducted, the Shojan hears any complaints, grievances or suggestions from his Kenjha. Immature do not attend; they engage in their normal practices, while a Kenjho heads any of the Shojan's classes. The remaining Kenjho advise the Shojan at the Yanza'sho.

MONTHLY

On the first day of each month, the ritual of Enshod-Mai is performed. Once again Kestrels hold this ritual in the central courtyard, though this time it replaces the morning practice session after breakfast. All three Quartermasters are present and supervise.

THE KEEP

"We shall draw ourselves into our Keeps; we shall withdraw from society; for they do not understand us, and so they fear us. Let us then give them something to fear; let them tremble at the name of the Kestrel!"

— Sind'ila Yokosh, Trian and Reformer, at the crucible of Leviathan's Spine

There are many Keeps of the Order of Kestrels throughout Providence, though only five are home to more than a few dozen Kestrels at a time. The smaller Keeps tend to be in remote places, and the Order often crafts them to blend in with the surrounding wildlife, whether through Wird or toil. No two are alike.

The five main Keeps of Providence are very different from one another, especially Domeka in Cry-Star. Still, they are more alike than the smaller Keeps.

POSITIONING

All of the Order's Keeps are in good, defensible positions, should the need arise. The lessons of the Schism were harsh, and the Order learnt them well. All Keeps are walled and employ guards, normally on a rotational basis, to keep watch. There is only one public entrance, and guards still regularly check other entrances that are unknown to the populace. To trespass upon the Order's territory is the height of folly. It is comparable to spying on an enemy camp in times of war. Kestrels deal with trespassers with little compassion, though they normally refrain from executing them.

THE CENTRAL COURTYARD

Every Keep, no matter its size, has a courtyard. This is the hub of all the activity within the Keep; training, meditation, rituals and Yanza'sho all take place here. The courtyard is necessarily the largest single area of the Keep, and the guards keep an especially watchful eye on any non-Kestrel brave enough to fly over this central area.

Also in the central courtyard is the Sacred Fire, again housed in every Keep, no matter how large or small. This is a large pyre that the Ken-Doyjha feeds and maintains daily. This is just one good reason that Kestrels don't regard the position of "housekeeper" as menial. The Sacred Fire burns day and night, rain or shine. In times of hardship or elemental fury, Kestrels sometimes maintain it with Wird, though they regard this as a poor substitute for the true element. The Sacred Fire is revered in all rituals and meditations; truly it is the heart of every Keep.

THE MAIN HALL

One large hall within each Keep is used for meals and intellectual study. This hall contains only a few benches or tables for cooking pots and teaching props, as all Kestrels sit on the floor for both eating and study. Kenjha also sometimes use the hall for kata study at night if the weather is particularly poor.

QUARTERS

To most Kestrels, their most important rooms are their quarters. Kenjha are given their own room within a Keep; the Immature live in larger dormitories, three to each. It is here that a Kestrel may relax, study alone, socialize and sleep. Quarters are generally furnished functionally rather than comfortably, as Kestrels do not possess many personal belongings. Nonetheless, many experienced Kenjha build up a small collection of mementoes as they progress through life.

The Quartermasters naturally have slightly different and larger rooms, as they often have administrative duties to perform. These rooms are still generally sparse and functional.

KITCHENS AND STOREROOMS

Generally, Kestrels prepare meals, keep fuel stocks for fires (including the Sacred Fire), make, keep and mend robes in these ancillary areas.

WARDROBE

"Finally I stood before Clinton of Sunarus, the most powerful Shojan in the Order. Black-skinned like any other Kestrel, he was dressed in plain, grey robes trimmed with red, and a red stone triangle clasped his black cloak about him as he rose to greet me. In the dim candlelight, the old Eagle seemed almost more Raven than I."

— Thular Gondrin, Raven Historian

The garb of a Kestrel is simple and understated. This is both functional and deliberate — a Kestrel must not be hindered in combat by fashionable clothes. The simplicity of the Kestrel costume ensures that no one mistakes who they are and that they are unarmed, adding to their presence.

To keep their garb simple, the Order assigns a dark grey costume to every Kenjha. Although there are some variants, all Kestrels essentially wear the same thing: a two-piece, loose-fitting suit of light cloth, often clasped at the cuffs and ankles to ensure the sleeves and legs do not restrict them when they fight.

In addition, many Kestrels wear a grey robe of heavier material. This robe is worn ceremonially during most rituals, and makes up the Kestrels' "formal" attire when they protect their charges, though some Kenjha consider it unnecessary. Regardless, Kestrels remove it when combat occurs.

All Kestrels also wear the seal of their Keep. This is a triangle of extremely durable Wird-crafted stone, coloured after their Dai'jan, and presented to them during their Kenjha-Mai. Kestrels often use this to clasp their cloak about them, though many also wear it as a belt buckle around their trousers. For most Kestrels this is the only colour on the clothing they wear, and other Kestrels use it to identify which Keep they hail from.

The Shojan and Dai'jan wear slightly different robes to mark their positions. The Shojan's robes are still grey, but trimmed with the Keep's colour, while the Dai'jan dresses in robes made entirely in the



Keep's colour. Ginjans do not wear any distinguishing robes, in keeping with their incognito position.

There are not many fashions within the Order; the robes are not particularly flexible in this regard. Kestrels occasionally opt for braided hair, or golden cuff-clasps, but these fashions soon pass.

The garb of the Kestrels is imposing in its simplicity, and very effective. They are easily recognizable; when one sees a Kestrel, there is no mistake that they are without weapon or armour — and confident in this fact.

PROVIDENCE

"I worry for our brothers in Haak San Bazaa. They become increasingly drawn into the political sphere, and their spiritualism undoubtedly suffers."

— Argostia Praelus, Dai'jan of Shansar-Mao

"Shansar-Mao? They'd see us die hugging trees rather than adapting to survive. Pah!"

— Sharonjit, Shojan of Al-Budozan

Fifteen hundred years ago, Kestrels established the five main Keeps within Providence. Over time, they naturally came to reflect their surroundings in many ways. Although the basic tenets of the Order remain the same wherever one travels, the exact manner in which Kestrels conduct rituals and routines varies greatly from Keep to Keep. Here, then, are the five.

SUNARIUS

Home City: Cliff-Spider

Colour: Red

Population: 1000

Shojan: Wileas Ashen-Wing, Troupial Hawk

Dai'jan: Kalia, Troupial Dove

The Sunarius Keep is the oldest and most prestigious in Providence. Its Quartermasters have always enjoyed a certain degree of laissez-faire autonomy from the rulers of Cliff-Spider, and in return they do not involve themselves in the city's politics.

Wileas is a hardy Shojan, known for his direct manner and authoritative confidence. He is the single most powerful Quartermaster in all of Providence, and knows it. Wileas does not abuse his position and he is a traditionalist, practising both Shii'klin and Mai-Shan. Wileas is, however, unafraid of delegation

and is rarely seen outside the Keep, instead allowing his Kenjho to administer and coordinate for him.

This has been known to cause unrest among both the younger, more ambitious Kenjha within the Keep. Many noble employers also dislike this attitude, tired of dealing with what they see as underlings. But Wileas's rule is patient and cautious. He enjoys particular favour from Raldowin for his Hawk lineage, and is quite happy to leave matters as they have been for centuries.

Kalia, by contrast, is known to all Kestrels as a sensitive, caring and compassionate Dai'jan. She is always available to advise on spiritual or Wird-related matters, and a lot more besides. This tireless woman is often at Wileas's side during Yanza'sho, ostensibly because Wileas is completely Wird-deficient. This helps lend credence to the odd whisper that she is the real decision-maker within Sunarius. Despite the rumours, few have a bad word to say about Kalia; whenever a Kestrel of Sunarius is in need of spiritual guidance, it is she whom they visit.

Sunarius Keep is covered in further detail later.

DOMEKA

Home City: Cry-Star

Colour: Grey

Population: 500 (in whole city)

Shojan: Ronhart, Troupial Dove

Dai'jan: Brinnur Tranbillan, Troupial Eagle

Cry-Star is an anomaly within the Order; the city does not house one central Keep, but many smaller ones instead. The Kestrels of Cry-Star call them temples, and the most prominent is Domeka. One of Ronhart's Kenjho maintains each temple, though Ronhart is unquestionably Shojan of them all. Although each temple has a name, the Kestrels refer to all of them together as Domeka.

This somewhat chaotic distribution of the Order is perhaps typical of the Capital, with its varied architecture and ramshackle layout. This distribution actually serves the Order quite well. No geographical location could suit a single, central Keep and still be in touch with all of the city at once.

Overseeing this potentially disastrous arrangement is Shojan Ronhart, and who but a gregarious, well-liked Dove could hold the Order together in this manner? Ronhart is the latest in a series of Doves to take the role of Shojan within Cry-Star. This line is of course not hereditary, but the Doves have always been the Troupial among Kestrels to stand out within the city; their rule has always been at the very least competent, so there is no dissent or resentment. It just seems to make sense.

Ronhart is well-liked and strong in the face of adversity, employing a veritable army of nearly 70 Kenjho to keep his finger on the city's pulse.

The only potential threat to Domeka's continued good fortune is Brinnur Tranbilla, the Dai'jan. Brinnur is also well liked and certainly respected throughout the city, but none can deny the old man is no longer able to keep pace with the hectic life of Domeka. An unmatched Wird user and very spiritual man, Brinnur is unfortunately also extremely stubborn. Ronhart has delayed forcing the ageing Eagle to stand down, as much out of fondness as anything. It is likely that Ronhart will not be able to leave the situation as it is for much longer.

AL-BUDOZAN ("HOME OF THE SPIRIT")

Home City: Haak San Bazaa

Colour: Gold

Population: 300

Shojan: Sharonjit, Troupial Dragon

Dai'jan: Iqbal Samrai, Troupial Eagle

Like the city that surrounds it, Al-Budozan Keep is purposeful in its design and wary of attack, whether physical or political. Kestrels built the current Keep soon after Red-Mud was rebuilt and named Haak San Bazaa. Sky-Spite's attack destroyed Al-Budozan along with the rest of the city. Like Haak San Bazaa, the Kestrels rebuilt their Keep once more. Al-Budozan now sits upon one of the wedge-shaped districts of the city, and has come to reflect the mercantile nature of Haak San Bazaa — often to the chagrin of other Keeps within Providence.

Sharonjit is a Pure Dragon who employs no Kenjho. She maintains all relations with the Mercantile Council herself, and is as adept a player of the game of politics as any non-Kestrel. Like all Shojan of Al-Budozan before her, she has only one aim — to further the Order's survival, and therefore its cause. She does this in a businesslike manner, regularly forging deals and bargains with Council leaders to keep the Order in a prominent position within the city.

To this end, Sharonjit is one of the foremost advocates of the Alliance's proposal to use Kestrels in exploring Providence, seeing it as perhaps the best way for the Order to evolve and grow into a major force once again.

Iqbal Samrai, the Dai'jan, is no less political, though less public than Sharonjit. This enigmatic figure rarely steps outside the Keep, and when he does, those who know him steer well clear. A proud Eagle of unarguable ability, Iqbal's patient but scheming nature is perfectly suited to the city of Haak San Bazaa.

ENTAKA

Home City: Bastion

Colour: Cyan

Population: 250

Shojan: Ruckniet ("He-Fights-Laughing"), Troupial Gargoyle

Dai'jan: Jowedd Six-Senses, Troupial Bat

The sudden population influx from Sun Guard has affected the Keep of Entaka indirectly; most of the people who fled were not nobles or rulers. The dramatic increase in civil unrest and court intrigue due to Bastion's population boom has given the Order more clout within the city.

It is unsurprising that Entaka's Shojan is a Gargoyle, and in keeping with his nature, Ruckniet is somewhat bombastic of the standards of the Order. Nevertheless his skills, both in the Arts and Wird, are well known and highly regarded. Ruckniet is resilient and thick-skinned, with a cheery nature that does him well when dealing with the Council of Bastion.

Entaka's Dai'jan, Jowedd Six-Senses, is also Iblii, though naturally more reserved than Ruckniet. Serving the Shojan as an advisor as much as Dai'jan, Jowedd is an academic philosopher at heart; his considered thinking has helped Ruckniet raise the profile of the Order within Bastion more than once.

SHANSAR-MAO

Home City: Water-Sister

Colour: Green

Population: 200

Shojan: Nirus, Troupial Raven

Dai'jan: Argostia Praelus, Troupial Raven

The smallest of the main Keeps within Providence, Shansar-Mao is also perhaps the most spiritual. Situated just outside Water-Sister on the Isle of the Eye, Shansar-Mao reflects the island's preponderance for the arts, being a naturally beautiful and essentially peaceful place.

Alas, the same cannot be said for the court of Watcher Preventine, and here the order finds itself in as much demand as elsewhere. Mai-Shan practitioner Shojan Nirus is a patient and receptive woman, practically born to rule the Keep of Water-Sister. Unfortunately, she seems to suffer from an indifference to the plight of the rest of Providence — an attitude which many of the Order's clientele do not appreciate.

Her Dai'jan, a Raven named Argostia Praelus, is also one of the Alliance of Kings' worst offenders for teaching Wird to the Fallen. Fortunately for him, here the rulers are more likely to turn the other cheek.

Shansar-Mao is an enigma within the Order; none truly know its direction or motives, save the Keep's adherence to the edicts of the Order. Many people refuse to believe that there cannot be something more to the members' blithe ways. Some critics feel that there must be an ulterior reason for their aloof nature.

SUNARIAS KEEP: HOME OF THE REFORMER HISTORY

Cliff-Spider has been the spiritual home of the Order of Kestrels in Providence for as long as anyone can remember. Even when the city was still a prison colony there were more Kestrels here serving the Wardens than anywhere else.

When the Emancipation began, Cliff-Spider soon followed Cry-Star and was the second city to free its prisoners. Suddenly there were no Wardens to serve, only kings and nobles. The Trian resided in Cliff-Spider; one of their number even sat on the wardens' council. Being the most trusted and loyal servants of the wardens, they continued to work for them, even in the new guise of the rulers. In many ways this was logical, as it heralded a return to the way the Order developed on Yas'Wail.

With the Emancipation also came the realisation that the Kestrels of the Free Cities would have to fight their brothers who now served the Warden Trinity. Not all Kestrels within the Order however, believed they should accept this situation with passivity. Thus began the Schism.

Even the Trian was in conflict with itself. Jherl Dishan, the eldest member, believed the Order should take a neutral stance and refuse to fight the Trinity. The youngest, Sind'ila Yokosh, saw no profit in this, and thought they should get involved, for a price. Shelo Graywing, the third member of the Trian, refused to decide the dispute. So it was that Cliff-Spider became the first city to see civil war among the Kestrels, a war that lasted for three bitter years and spread throughout all of the Free Cities.

When the dust settled, Yokosh, the only surviving member of the Trian, faced a grim picture. Many of the older Kenjha were dead, slain by the younger, angrier warriors. Yet the unrest and the confusion worried so many Kestrels that they fled to join their brethren in Red-Mud, Stone-Tree or Bone-Wail to continue serving the wardens. A band of young Kenjha assassinated Jherl Dishan. Meanwhile, Shelo Graywing could not be found, having fled the city soon after the troubles began. The rulers of Cliff-Spider, having lost some of their own nobles to the Schism, expressed dissatisfaction and distrust with the Kestrels. Yokosh had only one option: to reunite what remained of the Order within the Free Cities and make it a valuable commodity for this new, liberated society. Over the next thirty years she did just that, and when Yokosh returned to Cliff-Spider after the crucible at Leviathan's Spine, it was with new, invigorated determination.

So the Kestrels built Sunarius high in the spire of the Crysarius Bridge. Yokosh herself returned to the King of Cliff-Spider to pledge a new way for the Order, one loyal to the Free Cities. She presented the Shojan of the new Keep, an Eagle named T'Chao, before leaving the city for the new, secret home of the Trian. Yokosh was never seen again.

All the new Shojan around Providence had a formidable task, and none more so than T'Chao. Not only was Cliff-Spider home to almost as many Kenjha as the rest of the land put together, but the Shojan also had to follow in the redoubtable footsteps of Yokosh herself.

Nonetheless, Yokosh chose her new Shojan for good reasons and with insight; none of them failed her. T'Chao succeeded in slowly regaining the trust of Cliff-Spider's rulers. It was at this time that the Kestrels ratified one of Sunarius' distinguishing features.

Many senior Kestrels had been present at Cliff-Spider's old wardens' court due to the Trian's position. After the liberation of the city's prisoners, these Kestrels continued to be present at the new Royal Court as a matter of course. Unfortunately, when the Schism reached its peak, the Order's involvement in Cliff-Spider's politics resulted in many battles and assassinations spilling over into court life. Some Kestrels even assassinated a few high-ranking nobles because they were allied with one or more of the Trian.

So T'Chao proposed a bargain; in exchange for the nobles' trust and employ, the Kestrels of Sunarius would stay out of the city's politics. Never again would any of the Order play a part in the games of Cliff-Spider's court.

The last serious test of Sunarius' mettle came with the Lost Wars. Unprecedented though the request was, many of the Order helped the militia during these troubled times, and several of them underwent Epiphany on Cliff-Spider's battlefields. After the truce with the Lost Tribes was made, two new problems lay at the feet of Kurraka, then Shojan of Sunarius.

First, the Shojan had to decide whether to maintain the Order as part of the militia or to return to their former ways. After much deliberation Kurraka decided it best to withdraw from their new charge, lest the Order become a band of common mercenaries.

Second, and with greater implications, was the business of Shards. Since the very first Epiphany, the Order swayed back and forth between opinions on whether they should encourage Shards to join the Order or not. Still, no decision had been made. Now, with over fifty Kenjha returning to Sunarius with new powers, the issue was unavoidable.

Kurraka made a brave (and, with hindsight, wise) decision; they would not only allow Shards, but they actively encouraged them to join the ranks of the Order — on one condition. Those Kestrels who were already Kenjha would

spend some time in constant training, to hone their new powers. New recruits would have to undergo normal training, regardless of any experience before their Epiphanies. In this way they maintained the integrity of the Order, while preventing Kestrels from losing access to the potential of Shards. Once again Cliff-Spider was the catalyst of change within the Order.

Over the last fifteen hundred years, the Sunarius Keep has grown only a little in size; in stature however, it has continued to rise. A long line of capable Shojan continue to honour the agreement between them and the city's rulers to further the Order's reputation for bravery, honour and loyalty.

THE PRESENT

These days the Sunarius Keep Kestrels are renowned throughout Providence as the bravest and most loyal. Many Kenjha travel from other Keeps to either live at Sunarius or learn from Wileas or Kalia.

The only problem facing Sunarius currently is one of inertia. Many other Keeps, particularly Al-Budozan, see Wileas' refusal to break the old bonds and become involved in politics as a sure-fire path to the Keep's decline. Cliff-Spider has, throughout history, been at the forefront of the Order. Despite Providence's unrest and the future's unavoidable changes, Sunarius refuses to budge.

PROMINENT CHARACTERS

WILEAS ASHEN-WING, SHOJAN

The Shojan of Sunarius is a troubled man, and this is embodied in his taste for delegation; the Shojan has enough burdens of his own without having to concentrate on what he sees as trivial matters. Wileas desperately wants to push the Order forward, and secretly admires Al-Budozan for its progressive nature. At the same time however, he is also a traditionalist, and believes that the bonds of T'Chao's treaty tie his hands. Wileas is well aware that his fellow Hawk, King Raldowin, holds him in good favour. Unfortunately, he lacks the necessary conviction to propose changes to the age-old system.

(See page 87 for Wileas' Characteristics)

KALIA, DAI'JAN

Kalia is the real power behind Sunarius, and though many suspect this to be true, she is careful not to let the knowledge become public. Many of Wileas' Kenjha report to her directly after the Shojan, often without his knowledge. Many Kenjha trust Kalia far more than they do Wileas. Kalia, like Wileas, wishes to see the Order re-enter Cliff-Spider's political arena; unlike Wileas, she has the

freedom to pursue this desire. She is presently attempting to forge strong bonds with both Sharonjit of Al-Budozan and Ronhart of Domeka in an effort to coordinate the progression of the Order. Kalia fears that without this coordination and united front, the Order may be on the verge of another Schism.

LEETHE SHRYKE'BA, GINJAN

A Bat of proven wiliness and stealth, Leethe is nevertheless content to bury himself in his work, ignoring the implications of Sunarius' politics. Leethe sees his position as both timeless and enduring; no matter what the future holds for the Order, the Ginjan will always have a place, and one ruling faction or another will always need assassins. Leethe is a good friend of Jowedd Six-Senses of Entaka, and their regular correspondence perhaps helps the Ginjan to see a broader picture than the other Quartermasters of Sunarius.

STEFAN, KENJHO

This veteran Dragon, the oldest Kenjho in Sunarius, is respected throughout Cliff-Spider for his skills. His appointment to the post ten years ago came as no surprise. Stefan is capable, fair and a good tutor; unfortunately, he is well aware of this. Despite his inherent pride, he operates with extreme caution, bringing him into conflict with the younger Kenjho. Some of them even call him "The Wall."

BRACHTUS, KENJHA

Brachtus is a young Hawk and has only been a Kenjha for four years, but he already has a reputation in Sunarius. He is quick-witted, swift of action and decisive in nature; all this combined with his surprising wisdom for one so young points to his expected appointment to Kenjho within a few years. Brachtus is ambitious and willing to learn; part of his popularity stems from his willingness to admit his mistakes, and learn from them. Many see him as the embodiment of the Order to come.

GARRETTA, KEN-DOYJHA

Garretta is an unusual Ken-Doyjha, for her common duties see her in the guise of an assassin. This Dove Shard, possessing the ability of Invisibility, was immediately taken under the wing of Leethe upon her entry to the Order. She has proved more than capable of carrying out her work. This is unusual for Doves who generally dislike darkness and mischief, preferring instead to socialize. Still, it is her nature that has caused her to take on the role of Ken-Doyjha; it allows her to meet more of her compatriots than her regular duties would.

CHAPTER SIX

CHARACTERS

"The forging of a Kenjha is a long and painful process, it is true. But as a young sapling struggles to overcome the trials which nature places upon it — growing in time to become a tree of immeasurable fortitude — so does the immature warrior develop through hardship into a Kenjha of great strength."

— Ronhart, Shojan of Cry-Star

PLAYING KESTRELS

What drives a young would-be warrior to join the ranks of the Order of Kestrels? Ambition? The desire for fame or notoriety? A wish to protect their higher-caste brethren? Perhaps a feeling of spiritual kinship?

These are just some of the possibilities you must consider when designing a Kestrel player character. Motivation is key to these characters, perhaps as much so a People's Knight, for once one dons the mantle of a Kenjha, membership in the Order is for life. It is partly for this reason that Kestrels are renowned for their loyalty and trust. To betray a charge is to betray the Order, resulting in death or exile.

You design Kestrels much like other characters in Providence, with a few notable exceptions. First, they must possess certain minimum Traits to reflect their specialised training. Second, Kestrels who are Wird users are restricted in the spells they use. Third — and this cannot be emphasised enough — they are loyal to the Order above all other things. No matter what their assignment, no matter where they are, a Kestrel follows the doctrine of the Order first and their mission statement second. Never forget this.

Most characters will be young adults, having joined the Order when young and undergone several years of training and preparation before becoming Kenjha. An ambitious (and patient!) GM may wish to allow players to portray Immature Kestrels, playing out their training and development, though this would be rare.

There are also Shards, often already young adults, who will still need to undergo training in the Order before becoming Kenjha. Finally, there are Yinsha'jan, the Exiles, who are already experienced Kenjha with some real world experience under their belts.

These are exceptions, however, not the rule. Here we will concentrate on designing a typical Kestrel character, one who has only recently attained maturity. We recommend that starting Kenjha be designed at low-level (see Providence Main Rule Book pg. 33), though more or less experienced Kestrels may have different points distributions at the GM's discretion.

CHARACTERISTICS, TRAITS AND SKILLS

All Kestrels must possess the following minimum Characteristics, Traits and Skills. Other attributes, marked *, are recommended, though not compulsory. Remember also that Kestrels incapable of true flight, whether through wings or powers, are very rare.

CHARACTERISTIC MINIMUMS

Coordination 0
Strength 0
Constitution 0
Willpower 0
Psyche -1
Perception 0

REQUIRED SKILLS

Acrobatics 1
Area Knowledge 1*
Awareness 1*
Athletics 1
Awareness 1
Battle Tactics 1
Biology (Anatomy) 2
Body Language 1
Breakfall 2
Etiquette 1
First Aid 1
Hand To Hand 2
History (Kestrel) 1
Intimidation 1*
Martial Arts 2 Δ
Medicine 1
Meditation 2
Philosophy 1
Resist Pain 1
Streetwise 1* (REQUIRED for assassins)

Δ Special: see Rules below

REQUIRED TRAITS

Abnormal Appearance -5 (Jet-black skin, singular clothing)
Behaviour - Dedicated to Kestrel Order (-4)
Behaviour - Will never use weapons (-1)
Combat Reflexes +5*
Light Sleeper +3*
Literate +5
Organization (Kestrel) +2
Reputation +2 (Good fighter)
Reputation +2 (Trustworthy)



THE NINE ARTS

The Nine Arts are central to any Kestrel character. Which Art a Kenjha practices can often give clues to their philosophy on, and style of, combat. Even the most experienced Kestrels rarely practice more than two or three of the Arts, as each takes a lifetime to fully master — when designing a Kestrel character, be sure to choose which Art they follow wisely.

For descriptions of the forms and applications of each Art, refer to chapter 3.

RULES

Purchasing skill levels in the Nine Arts cost the same as normal skills. However, there are two important differences between Kestrels and normal martial artists that reflect their intensive, focused training.

First, Kestrels must purchase their chosen Art at least twice. This will give them a minimum of six Combat Manoeuvres to associate with it, ensuring variety even between two practitioners of the same Art.

Second, each Art has three associated Combat Manoeuvres (though Shii'klin has four to reflect its more rounded style) which only practitioners of the relevant Arts can learn. These are treated like any other Combat Manoeuvre Skill, and characters can learn these at any time. However, these manoeuvres must be linked to the Martial Art unlike other Combat Manoeuvres which can be purchased separately.

In this way, Kestrel characters are more versatile, if not necessarily possessed of more raw power, than other martial artists; this is as it should be. A true Kestrel knows that to become “trapped” in any one formula of fighting is to stagnate and wither. Instead, they overcome those of equal rank through a more varied use of their Arts.

Martial art bonuses for any of the Nine Arts are the same as for any other Martial Art of that style (Hard, Hard/Soft, Soft). Below is a guide to the styles of each Art:

Hard Styles: Iasha'klin, Sera'klin, T'Chao, Tekkan, Yokosh.

Hard/Soft Styles: Esho-Ginja'klin, Mai-Shan, Shii'klin, Su'Machao.

PURCHASING MULTIPLE MARTIAL ARTS

Martial Arts is a special skill in the Creative System — it is a skill which can be purchased several times. This may reflect one of two situations. The first is very simple; the character is learning two separate martial arts such as karate and judo. The second situation is when players wish to increase the number of combat manoeuvres linked to a particular martial art style.

Purchasing the same Art several times presents a special situation for resolving combat. Each Martial Art skill can link with three Combat Manoeuvres and one other skill. When using a Combat Manoeuvre, the player chooses the Martial Arts skill to which the Combat Manoeuvre is linked. The following are two examples of both possible scenarios.

EXAMPLE 1

A character has Martial Arts - Karate (a Hard style) at level 4 with the following Combat Manoeuvres linked to it: Strike at 3, Parry at 2 and Throw at 4. They also have Martial Arts - Judo (a Soft style) at level 2 with the following Combat Manoeuvres: Throw, obviously at 4 as indicated above, Grapple at 2 and Dodge at 3. Now, if the character attempts to Dodge, they will use Martial Arts - Judo 2 + Dodge 3 with the Soft Defensive bonus for a level 2 Martial Art. The character cannot use Martial Arts - Karate 4 + Dodge 3 because Dodge is not one of the Combat Manoeuvres linked to Karate. However, if the character were to attempt a throw, he could either use Martial Arts - Karate 4 + Throw 4 (with the Other bonus for a Hard Martial Art at level 4) or he could use Martial Arts - Judo 2 + Throw 4 (with the Other bonus for a Soft Martial Art at level 2). The character is able to make a choice in this case because Throw is linked to both of his Martial Arts skills, Karate and Judo.

EXAMPLE 2

A character has extensive knowledge of Karate, having purchased it twice. The character has Martial Arts - Karate at level 4 with Strike 3, Throw 2 and Parry 4 linked to it. The character also has Martial Arts: Karate at level 2 with Grapple 2, Charge 1 and Dodge 2 linked to it. In this case, should the character wish to strike an opponent, they would roll Coordination + Martial Arts - Karate 4 + Strike 3. If the character, however, wished to grapple an opponent, they would roll Coordination + Martial Arts - Karate 2 + Grapple 2. They would not roll Martial Arts - Karate 4 because the Combat Manoeuvre - Grapple is linked to the level 2 version of the skill. Simply put, whenever characters attempt a Combat Manoeuvre, they use the Martial Arts skill associated with it. Furthermore, in this situation, should the character be required to roll a knowledge (Intelligence) based roll involving the Martial Art, to recall a specific philosophy of the Martial Art for example, the character uses the higher of the two skills (Martial Arts - Karate 4 in the above example). They may, however, use the second skill (Martial Arts - Karate 2) as a secondary skill to reflect their greater knowledge of the skill.

With either situation, it is imperative that the player clearly indicate the Combat Manoeuvres linked to each Martial Arts skill to avoid confusion. If a Combat Manoeuvre is linked to two (or more) Martial Arts, it should still be clearly marked; however, the player may choose which Martial Art is used when they make use of the manoeuvre. It is also important to note that Combat Manoeuvres need only be bought once. One does not need to purchase CM - Strike once for Martial Arts - Karate and a second time for Martial Arts - Judo if it is linked to both skills.

COMBAT MANOEUVRES

The Combat Manoeuvres are divided into basic and advanced manoeuvres. Basic manoeuvres are similar to the basic manoeuvres that are listed in the Main Rule Book (pages 69-72). Anyone creating a character with Martial Arts can purchase basic manoeuvres. Advanced manoeuvres can only be learned by Kestrel characters. All advanced Combat Manoeuvres have a required (basic) skill. It is mandatory that a character have the required skill (at any level) in order to possess the advanced skill.

A SPECIAL NOTE ABOUT PARRY

As it has been stated, Kestrels do not use weapons or shields. Nonetheless, due to extensive hardening techniques, they are able to parry effectively with their hands, at no penalty.

A NOTE ON DAMAGE

At several points throughout the following Combat Manoeuvres we refer to a character's normal damage. Normal damage refers to the damage that characters do if they simply use CM - Strike to hit their opponent. For a fist, this would be 2 + the attacker's damage bonus. However, a Dragon's tail, a Hawk's claws and a Gargoyle's horns, for example, do more than the base 2 points of damage.

BASIC MANOEUVRES

COMBAT MANOEUVRE - COMBINATION (COORDINATION)

Type: Opposed
Category: Learned
Opposed Skill: Combat
Support Skills: Combat Manoeuvres, Hand to Hand, Martial Arts

This Combat Manoeuvre allows a character to combine two of their Combat Manoeuvres into one. When the skill is purchased, the player must declare which two manoeuvres are combined and in what order they are used. A player may not combine two manoeuvres that are the same. Furthermore,

the manoeuvres being combined must be basic manoeuvres. GMs, as always, have the right to veto any combinations that they disapprove.

Only one roll is required to resolve this skill. The character rolls Coordination plus the lowest of CM - Combo or the two Combat Manoeuvres involved in the combo. For example, if a character has a Coordination of 1, CM - Combo: Parry/Strike 2, CM - Parry 1 and CM - Strike 4, they would roll their Coordination 1 + CM - Parry 1 since Parry is the lowest of the three Combat Manoeuvres.

The roll is used to resolve both Combat Manoeuvres as normal. For example, a character has CM - Combo (Dodge/Strike). The character makes use of the skill and rolls a 14. This roll of 14 is used to resolve the character's dodge and the character's attack with strike.

If the combo is made up of Parry and Dodge, it may be used as an abortive action (see Main Rule Book, page 216). In this case, the character can abort to Combo (Parry/Dodge (or Dodge/Parry)) in order to avoid an attack. However, if the combo is made up with any other combination (ie: Dodge/Strike) it cannot be used as an abortive action. The character cannot abort to this Combat Manoeuvre in order to dodge an attack. They must wait until their action and use it then.

This skill gains the appropriate Martial Arts bonuses as appropriate to the specific skills involved. These bonuses are only applied to the applicable skill, not both skills involved. If, for example, one has a Parry/Dodge combo, they do not gain the Defensive Martial Arts bonus twice for each skill. They gain the Defensive Martial Arts bonus for each skill separately.

After performing this manoeuvre, the Kestrel must lose two Endurance points instead of the usual one.

COMBAT MANOEUVRE - FEINT (COORDINATION)

Type: Opposed

Category: Innate

Opposed Skill: Combat

The purpose of this manoeuvre is to disorient an opponent in order to attack more effectively. The Kestrel rolls to hit normally but does no damage; instead, the attacker gains half (rounded down) their margin of success as a bonus to their next attack roll against the same opponent. An attack must follow the Feint, or the bonus is lost.

ADVANCED MANOEUVRES

COMBAT MANOEUVRE - BELT THROW (STRENGTH)

Art: Su'Machao, Shii'klin

Type: Opposed

Category: Learned

Opposed Skill: Combat

Support Skills: Combat Manoeuvres, Hand to Hand, Martial Arts

Required Skill: Throw

The attacker grabs hold of the target, lifts them into the air and slams them into the ground. The attacker rolls Strength + CM - Belt Throw. Their opponent may attempt to avoid the throw by rolling either Coordination or Strength + Throw against a Target Number of 7 + the attacker's margin of success. If the throw succeeds, the target takes an amount of damage equal to the attacker's Strength bonus plus their level in CM - Belt Throw. After a successful Belt Throw, the target is prone and subject to a -2 dice penalty until they regain their footing (which requires an action). This manoeuvre gains the Other bonus from the Martial Arts skill.

COMBAT MANOEUVRE - FLYING KICK (COORDINATION)

Art: Esho-Ginja'klin, Iasha'klin, Sera'klin, Shii'klin, T'Chao, Tekkan, Yokosh

Type: Opposed

Category: Learned

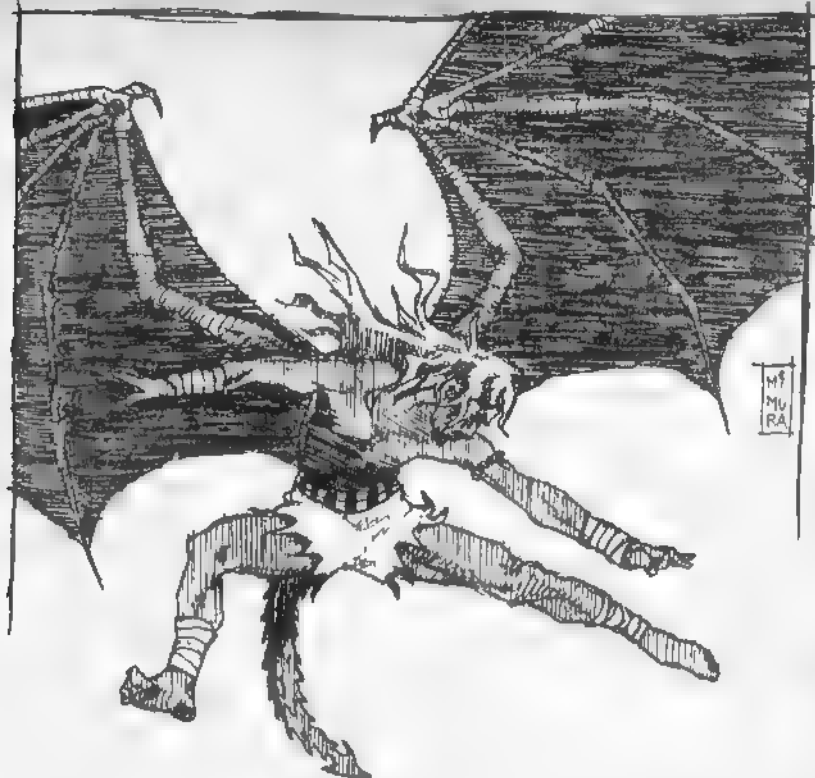
Opposed Skill: Combat

Support Skills: Combat Manoeuvres, Hand to Hand, Martial Arts

Required Skill: Strike

Kestrels performing a Flying Kick launch themselves through the air, attempting to land a crushing kick. The attacker must start the action at least three yards away from the target. If the attack successfully hits, it does an amount of damage equal to a normal attack + the level of CM - Flying Kick.

Characters who fail to successfully land a Flying Kick by a margin of failure greater than six will be prone and subject to a -2 dice penalty until they regain their footing. This manoeuvre gains the Damage bonus from the Martial Arts skill.



COMBAT MANOEUVRE - FURIOUS SHIELD (COORDINATION)

Art: tasha'klin, T'Chao

Type: Opposed

Category: Studied

Opposed Skill: Combat

Support Skills: Acrobatics, Combat Manoeuvres, Hand to Hand, Martial Arts

Required Skill: Parry

This is an exceptionally powerful defensive manoeuvre similar to a Parry. The Kestrel becomes a blur of motion as they form a living shield with their arms. The character makes one roll which is used to parry any and all attacks directed at them, even from multiple attackers, until they stop the Furious Shield. Ranged attacks, such as arrows, may be parried as the Kestrel knocks them harmlessly out of the air. Shard-based powers and magical ranged attacks, however, cannot be blocked. If any attack gets through the Furious Shield and successfully hits the character, the manoeuvre will cease to provide any defense.

The Kestrel may not move or take any action while performing the Furious Shield. The Kestrel may stop Furious Shield at any time; however, they may only resume normal combat in the following segment. This manoeuvre gains the Defensive bonus from the Martial Arts skill.

COMBAT MANOEUVRE - INVISIBLE STRIKE (COORDINATION)

Art: Esho-Ginja'klin

Type: Opposed

Category: Learned

Opposed Skill: Awareness + Perception

Support Skills: Combat Manoeuvres, Hand to Hand, Martial Arts, Stealth

Required Skill: Strike

This manoeuvre is a combination of silent movement and swift action. The Kestrel must attack from out of the target's line of sight. Kestrels who use this style are known for disappearing in the midst of a fight.

If the Kestrel attacks an opponent out of combat, surprising them, the Kestrel must simply roll against a Target Number of 7 in order to hit. If, however, Kestrels attempt to use Invisible Strike in combat, they roll Invisible Strike + Coordination as they attempt to slip out of their opponent's line of sight to launch their attack. Should the roll succeed, damage is equal to the damage of a normal attack plus the level of the skill. This manoeuvre gains the Damage bonus from the Martial Arts skill.

COMBAT MANOEUVRE - NERVE STRIKE (COORDINATION)

Art: Mai-Shan, Shii'klin

Type: Opposed

Category: Studied

Opposed Skill: Combat

Support Skills: Bio - Physical Anatomy, Combat Manoeuvres, Hand to Hand, Martial Arts

Required Skill: Strike

This manoeuvre is one of the single deadliest attacks in the Order. When properly executed, the Nerve Strike deadens nerves in the body of the target, inflicting a -1 die penalty per Nerve Strike, up to a maximum of -4 dice. This penalty is cumulative with any other penalties, such as wound or encumbrance penalties (potentially raising the penalty above -4 dice).

A Nerve Strike is only effective if a normal strike would do damage to the target. If a normal strike would not normally do any damage then the Nerve Strike is ineffective.

This attack is useful for peacefully incapacitating a foe since it debilitates a person without doing any actual damage. It is also very useful against targets that have a high Body but little armour.

COMBAT MANOEUVRE - SLAPPING STRIKE (COORDINATION)

Art: Su'Machao
Type: Opposed
Category: Learned
Opposed Skill: Combat
Support Skills: Combat Manoeuvres, Hand to Hand, Martial Arts
Required Skill: Strike

In this manoeuvre the attacker makes three or four swift, sharp slapping attacks to the target's face, knocking them off-balance. If successful, no actual damage is done but the target suffers a -2 dice penalty. This penalty disappears upon completion of their next action. This means that should a third character attack the target, the target is at -2 dice while resolving this attack. This penalty is cumulative with other penalties. This manoeuvre gains the Other bonus from the Martial Arts skill.

COMBAT MANOEUVRE - SPINNING HURRICANE (COORDINATION)

Art: Yokosh
Type: Opposed
Category: Learned
Opposed Skill: Combat
Support Skills: Acrobatics, Combat Manoeuvres, Hand to Hand, Martial Arts
Required Skill: Strike

Kestrels who perform the Spinning Hurricane launch themselves into the air in a spinning leap. This enables them to perform two strikes with their feet in one action.

These two attacks are resolved with one roll and may be directed at one opponent. The target is required to only attempt one defensive manoeuvre in order to avoid the two attacks. If the target makes a successful defensive roll they take no damage. If the target fails their defensive roll they will take normal damage plus the level of the manoeuvre — twice. That does not mean that damage is doubled — it is applied separately two times. This manoeuvre gains the Damage bonus from the Martial Arts skill.

For example, a Kestrel launches a Spinning Hurricane, successfully hitting their target. If the target rolls a defensive skill and succeeds, they avoid the attack entirely. However, if they fail their defensive roll, the Kestrel inflicts damage twice. The Kestrel's normal damage plus the level of CM - Spinning Hurricane is applied to the target. Once that damage is accounted for, the damage is applied a second time, further injuring the target.

COMBAT MANOEUVRE - SWEEP (COORDINATION)

Arts: Esho-Ginja'klin, Mai-Shan, Shii'klin, Su'Machao, Tekkan, Yokosh

Type: Opposed

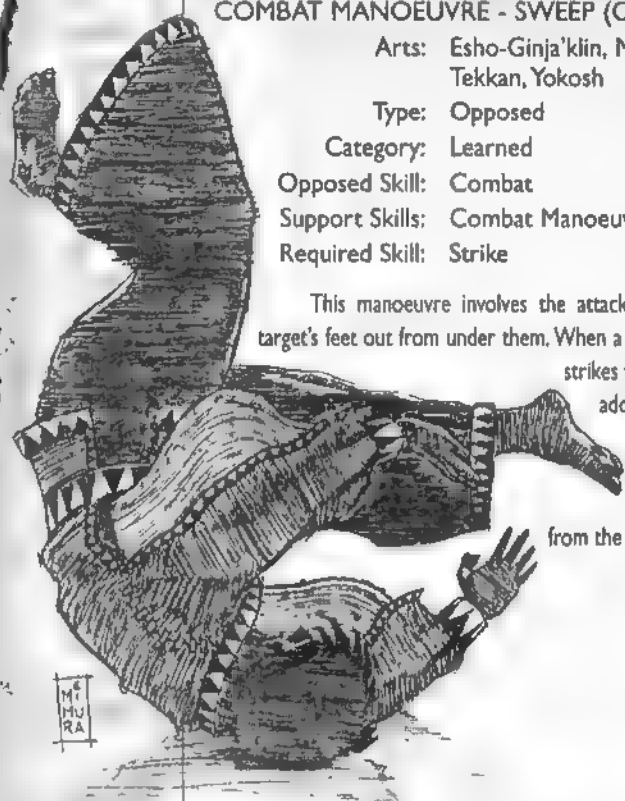
Category: Learned

Opposed Skill: Combat

Support Skills: Combat Manoeuvres, Hand to Hand, Martial Arts

Required Skill: Strike

This manoeuvre involves the attacker crouching low and sweeping the target's feet out from under them. When a CM - Sweep is successful, the Kestrel strikes the target, inflicting normal damage. In addition, targets are considered prone and are subject to a -2 dice penalty until they regain their footing. This manoeuvre gains the Damage bonus from the Martial Arts skill.



COMBAT MANOEUVRE - SWOOP (COORDINATION)

Art: Sera'klin

Type: Opposed

Category: Learned

Opposed Skill: Combat

Support Skills: Combat Manoeuvres, Hand to Hand, Martial Arts

Required Skill: Charge

To perform this manoeuvre, Kestrels must begin their action both in the air and at least 9 yards away from the target. If the two combatants are in a dogfight, the Kestrel must win a dogfight roll (see Main Rule Book, page 221) in order to gain position. The attacker swoops down upon the target, like their namesake incarnate, attempting to bowl them over before returning to the air. If successful, the amount of damage done is equal to the speed, in yards per second, the attacker is moving (as per a normal charge - see page 223 of the Main Rule Book). In addition, the target is considered prone (knocked to the ground or losing control in the air) and suffers a -2 dice penalty until they can regain control. After the attack, Kestrels may continue flying up to their movement rate while finishing their action. This manoeuvre gains the Damage bonus from the Martial Arts skill.

COMBAT MANOEUVRE - TOTAL COMBINATION (COORDINATION)

Art: Tekkan

Type: Opposed

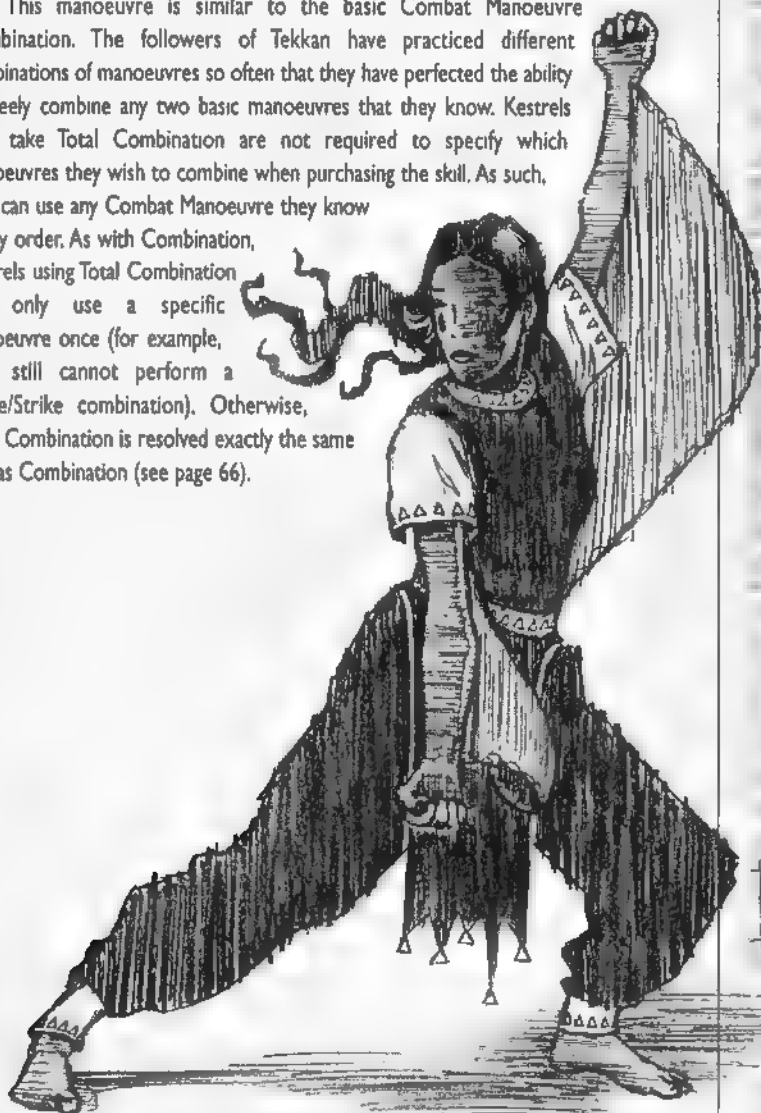
Category: Studied

Opposed Skill: Combat

Support Skills: Combat Manoeuvres, Hand to Hand, Martial Arts

Required Skill: two other Combat Manoeuvres

This manoeuvre is similar to the basic Combat Manoeuvre Combination. The followers of Tekkan have practiced different combinations of manoeuvres so often that they have perfected the ability to freely combine any two basic manoeuvres that they know. Kestrels who take Total Combination are not required to specify which manoeuvres they wish to combine when purchasing the skill. As such, they can use any Combat Manoeuvre they know in any order. As with Combination, Kestrels using Total Combination can only use a specific manoeuvre once (for example, they still cannot perform a Strike/Strike combination). Otherwise, Total Combination is resolved exactly the same way as Combination (see page 66).



COMBAT MANOEUVRE - TURN ATTACK (COORDINATION)

Art: Mai-Shan

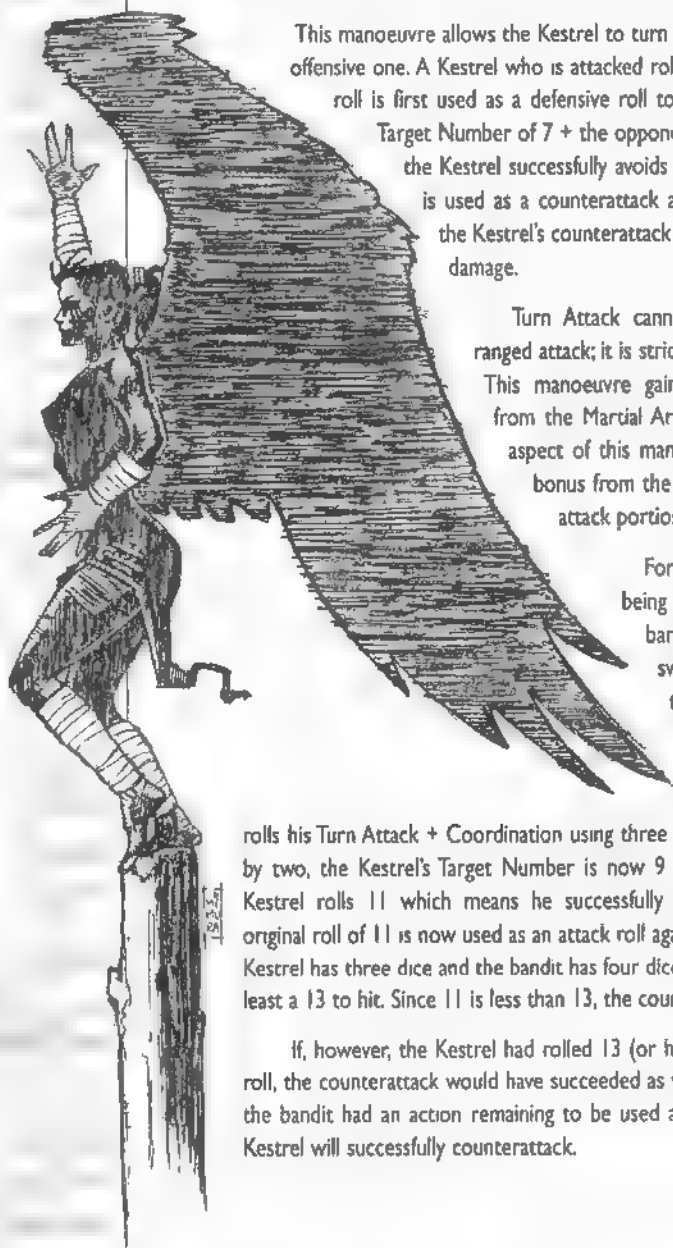
Type: Opposed

Category: Learned

Opposed Skill: Combat

Support Skills: Combat Manoeuvres, Hand to Hand, Martial Arts

Required Skill: Strike



This manoeuvre allows the Kestrel to turn a defensive move into an offensive one. A Kestrel who is attacked rolls CM - Turn Attack. This roll is first used as a defensive roll to avoid the attack with a Target Number of 7 + the opponent's margin of success. If the Kestrel successfully avoids the attack, the same roll is used as a counterattack against their opponent. If the Kestrel's counterattack succeeds they do normal damage.

Turn Attack cannot be used to avoid a ranged attack; it is strictly used in hand-to-hand. This manoeuvre gains the Defensive bonus from the Martial Arts skill for the defensive aspect of this manoeuvre and the Damage bonus from the Martial Arts skill for the attack portion.

For example, a Kestrel is being attacked by a bandit. The bandit has four dice in sword and attempts to hit the Kestrel. He rolls poorly, rolling 9, earning a margin of success of two. The Kestrel then

rolls his Turn Attack + Coordination using three dice. Since the bandit hit by two, the Kestrel's Target Number is now 9 to avoid the attack. The Kestrel rolls 11 which means he successfully dodged the attack. The original roll of 11 is now used as an attack roll against the bandit. Since the Kestrel has three dice and the bandit has four dice, the Kestrel must roll at least a 13 to hit. Since 11 is less than 13, the counterattack misses.

If, however, the Kestrel had rolled 13 (or higher) on his Turn Attack roll, the counterattack would have succeeded as well as the dodge. Unless the bandit had an action remaining to be used as a defensive action, the Kestrel will successfully counterattack.

COMBAT MANOEUVRE - THE TYPHOON (COORDINATION)

Art: T'Chao
Type: Opposed
Category: Learned
Opposed Skill: Combat
Support Skills: Acrobatics, Combat Manoeuvres, Hand to Hand, Martial Arts
Required Skill: Strike

This is the manoeuvre most practitioners of T'Chao are known for, and with good reason. The Kestrel springs up and forward, throwing themselves at the target in a spinning motion. First they strike with their hands, then both feet, landing poised to strike again. If this attack is successful, it inflicts normal damage twice. If the attack is successful, the target is knocked prone, suffering a -2 dice penalty until they regain their footing. The target can resist being knocked prone as with a normal Throw (see Main Rule Book, page 72). This manoeuvre gains the Damage bonus from the Martial Arts skill.

COMBAT MANOEUVRE - WING STRIKE (COORDINATION)

Art: Sera'klin
Type: Opposed
Category: Learned
Opposed Skill: Combat
Support Skills: Combat Manoeuvres, Flight, Hand to Hand, Martial Arts
Required Skill: Flight, Strike

This manoeuvre may be performed in two instances. First, Kestrels may perform a CM - Wing Strike to baffle and confuse their target by buffeting them with their wings. If successful it does no damage. Instead targets suffer a -2 dice penalty. This penalty disappears upon completion of their next action.

The other use of Wing Strike allows the Kestrel to make a defensive roll if the Kestrel is attacked from behind, whether in flight or not. In this case, Wing Strike may be used as an Abortive action (similar to dodge and parry). The Kestrel makes a Wing Strike + Coordination roll against a Target Number of 7 + the attacker's margin of success. If successful, they take no damage and in fact hit the attacker. Damage from a Wing Strike in this instance is equal to 2 + twice the Kestrel's Tier in Flight. This manoeuvre gains the Defensive bonus from the Martial Arts skill.

Anyone using their wings to strike an opponent using CM - Strike does an amount of damage equal to 2 + their Tier in Flight.

COMBAT MANOEUVRE - WRATH OF IASHA (COORDINATION)

Art: Iasha'klin

Type: Opposed

Category: Studied

Opposed Skill: Combat

Support Skills: Combat Manoeuvres, Hand to Hand, Martial Arts

Required Skills: Strike

This manoeuvre gives most practitioners of Iasha'klin their reputation as unstoppable. It may only be performed directly after a successful CM - Strike by the Kestrel. Kestrels press home their advantage as the Fire flows through them, giving them a number of attacks equal to their CM - Wrath of Iasha skill level/2 (rounded up) + 1. These multiple attacks all count as one action and must all be directed against the original target. The Kestrel rolls Wrath of Iasha + Coordination. This roll is used to resolve all of the attacks as one. If the roll misses, all attacks miss. If the roll hits, all of them will potentially hit. The target may still attempt to dodge or parry the fury of attacks. Since the attacks are coming in at an extremely rapid rate, only one defensive roll is required. If the defensive roll succeeds, then all attacks are avoided.

If the attacks successfully hit, the damage from Wrath of Iasha is half of the Kestrel's normal damage for each attack.

The massive expenditure of energy required for this manoeuvre has a price. The Kestrel spends one point of Endurance per strike. This manoeuvre gains the Damage bonus from the Martial Arts skill.



COMBAT MANOEUVRE - KATA

Art: Any Martial Art

Type: Opposed

Category: Studied

Opposed Skill: Combat

Support Skills: Combat Manoeuvres, Hand to Hand, Martial Arts

Required Skill: not applicable

A kata is a rigorously practiced set of manoeuvres designed to teach a martial artist to react without thinking. As they master a kata, one move will instinctively lead to another and then another. A kata can range from a few manoeuvres long to well over 100. In practice one must master all the moves. In combat however, it is rare that a fighter will be able to string all the moves of a kata together. If they do, they will become more efficient and deadly.

In Providence, if a fighter wants to launch into a kata, they must first perform any successful Combat Manoeuvre. Characters may then, on their next action, use CM - Kata as a secondary to any other Combat Manoeuvre they are using. This means that katas can only be used if secondary skills are being used.

When a manoeuvre using Kata as a secondary skill is successful, the character gains a +1 on their next manoeuvre. Each consecutive successful manoeuvre adds an additional +1 (maximum of +10) to their roll. Characters using this must continue to attack the same target. Also, if the character fails in a roll, or is damaged by an incoming attack, they lose any accumulated bonus and must return to normal combat (i.e. they cannot use CM - Kata in their following action.) Lastly, in addition, the character is considered to be focused on their opponent. This gives them +3 to their roll against the target, but other opponents gain +3 to hit the character.

Advanced Katas

In real life, katas are strict sets of moves that have been perfected over time. If the GM wishes to exercise an increased level of realism, they can ask their players to design their katas beforehand. This means that the character will have to have the moves they are planning to use pre-selected. Should the circumstances not allow for a manoeuvre in the kata, the character will lose any bonus and must return to normal combat. In other words, should you have a Throw planned but someone else has just knocked your opponent to the ground, your kata has effectively been stopped.

The character may make a number of katas equal to their level in this skill times 10. The maximum number of Combat Manoeuvres that may be in each kata is equal to their skill level times 20. This means that a character with CM - Kata could have up to 10 katas that have as many as 20 moves each.

If this option is taken, the bonus for a successful move is increased from +1 to +2, and the maximum bonus that can be earned is +20.

WIRD

Within the Order of Kestrels, Wird is taught as an extension of the fighting form. The teachings of the Dai'jan are available to any who have the capability to learn Wird. As a result, there are many Kestrels who can manipulate a limited form of Wird. These Kestrels are perhaps not as skilful as their "mundane" brethren in a stand-up slugfest, since Wird training often takes away from their regular combat training. Overall though, their additional Wird skills easily make up for their deficiencies in physical combat.

The first list of spells below is unique to the Order of Kestrels. Also, in addition to the unique spells taught to them by the Order, Wird users may choose additional Wird Dancer spells from the Providence Main Rule Book. The second list comprises the spells most commonly taught to Kestrel Wird users. To learn others is possible but requires an effort to find a teacher.

LEVEL ONE SPELLS

BATTLE MOVEMENT

Type: Miscellaneous, Wird
Element: Air
Casting Time: 11 Seconds
Range: Self
Area: NA
Duration: 2 Rounds + 1/Extra Wird

The caster finds that they are even more in tune with the flow of the fight. They gain +2 Coordination and +1 Perception.

FOCUS

Type: Miscellaneous, Wird
Element: Earth
Casting Time: 30 Seconds
Range: Self
Area: NA
Duration: Instant

This spell aids the caster in Meditation, which must take place directly after casting for the spell to have any effect. If successful, the normal target number for Meditation is reduced from 11 to 8.

BODY TEMPLE

Type: Miscellaneous, Wird
Element: Earth
Casting Time: 3 Seconds
Range: Contact
Area: Self/Target
Duration: 1 Minute + 2 Rounds/Extra Wird

The caster manages to harden their skin, giving them protection against a variety of attacks. Once this spell is cast, they gain 2 points of armour.

THE THIRD EYE

Type: Miscellaneous, Wird
Element: Air
Casting Time: 12 Seconds
Range: Self
Area: NA
Duration: 1 Minute + 1/Extra Wird

This spell increases all five of the caster's senses, giving a bonus of +3 to all Perception-based rolls. It does not, however, allow them to sense things outside of their normal faculties (e.g. Infrared vision, night vision).

LEVEL TWO SPELLS

DANCE OF THE FLAMES

Type: Miscellaneous, Wird
Element: Water
Casting Time: 10 Seconds
Range: Self
Area: NA
Duration: 3 Rounds + 1/Extra Wird

The caster reacts like wildfire. This has the effect of increasing their Initiative by +5 and conferring a penalty of -3 on any attacks directed at them.

FALLING LEAF

Type: Miscellaneous, Wird
Element: Air
Casting Time: 3 Seconds
Range: Self
Area: NA
Duration: 1 Minute + 1 Minute/Extra Wird

The caster's weight is reduced, enabling them to fall from great heights without suffering harm. Once cast, the caster may fall from up to 50 feet without taking damage. Any distance greater than this is reduced by 50 feet as far as falling damage is concerned (Providence Main Rule Book pg. 224). The caster falls at normal speed — in this way, this spell is sometimes used to enable Kestrels to make surprise attacks from great heights.

FISTS OF IASHA

Type: Offensive, Elemental
Element: Fire
Casting Time: 10 Seconds
Range: Self
Area: NA
Duration: 3 Rounds + 1/Extra Wird

This spell is similar to the spell Flaming Weapon (Providence Main Rule Book, pg.169). The casters' hands and feet are transformed into a magical fire, causing +5 extra damage to any strike they make. These attacks can only be parried with a shield. The spell caster can't use the skills CM-Grapple or CM-Throw while the spell is in effect.

LEVEL THREE SPELLS

HARNESS THE FIRE

Type: Offensive, Elemental
Element: Fire
Casting Time: 9 Seconds
Range: Self
Area: Target
Duration: Instant

With this spell the caster harnesses, then unleashes, their Inner Fire. The caster projects a blast of fire, dealing 9 points of damage to the target.

FOOTFALLS OF THE TIGER

Type: Miscellaneous, Wird
Element: Air
Casting Time: 1 3 Seconds
Range: NA
Area: Self
Duration: 3 Rounds + 1/Extra Wird

This spell enables the caster to move silently, making little sound. The spell only masks footfalls and breathing; any other sound they make will be normally audible. Anyone attempting to hear the caster will have a perception roll at -9 dice. This spell is naturally very popular with assassins.

SOLIDITY

Type: Miscellaneous, Wird
Element: Earth
Casting Time: 14 seconds
Range: NA
Area: Self
Duration: 3 rounds + 1/extra Wird

After casting this spell, the caster gains tremendous weight and strength. The caster has to be careful about their footing, as there is a chance that flimsy floors might not support their weight. The changes to the caster's body are as follows.

x 4.4 mass, +6 Strength, +6 Constitution, +1 Armour

LEVEL FOUR SPELLS

CALL OF THE GATH HADATCHI

Type: Miscellaneous, Wird
Element: Air
Casting Time: 1 Minute
Range: NA
Area: 100 Miles
Duration: Instant

This spell is normally only used by Dal'jan, though any may learn it. The caster performs a quick Kata exercise. This activates an item that is kept within each temple. The item, which can vary from Keep to Keep, sends out a call discernible only to the Gath Hadatchi. There is some suspicion that the Moss Masks can pick up this signal, but it has never been proven. Any Gath Hadatchi within 100 miles will hear this instantly. This Spell is normally used to summon a Gath Hadatchi to the Keep when a message needs to be relayed.

WARRIOR'S FORM

Type: Miscellaneous, Wird
Element: Water
Casting Time: 13 Seconds
Range: Self
Area: NA
Duration: 3 Rounds + 1/Extra Wird

The caster takes on a form that will increase their combat readiness. After this spell is cast, the Kestrel gains +4 Coordination, +4 Strength, +4 Constitution and +4 armour.

TAKE ROOT

Type: Miscellaneous, Wird
Element: Earth
Casting Time: 10 Seconds
Range: Self
Area: NA
Duration: 3 Rounds + 1/Extra Wird

The Kestrel uses Wird to become connected to the earth itself. In this way, the caster becomes rooted to the spot where they stand. They can only be moved by characters who beat them in a Strength roll; the caster has 25 strength for the purposes of the roll. Should the caster become stunned or unconscious, they can be moved as usual.

This spell obviously reduces the caster's mobility to zero while it is active. The caster also cannot Dodge without losing the effect of the spell. Opponents gain 3 dice when trying to strike the Kestrel, who may Parry as normal.

LEVEL FIVE SPELLS

CHAMPION'S FORM

Type: Miscellaneous, Wird
Element: Fire
Casting Time: 14 Seconds
Range: Self
Area: NA
Duration: 3 Rounds + 1/Extra Wird

This spell is an improved version of the Warrior's form. Kestrels who have cast this spell are incredible fighters. While this spell is active, the caster gains +9 Coordination, +9 Strength, +9 Constitution and +9 armour.

CLOSING THE DISTANCE

Type: Offensive, Wird
Element: Air
Casting Time: 10 Seconds
Range: Special
Area: NA
Duration: 3 Rounds + 1/Extra Wird

While this spell is active, the caster has the ability to manipulate the very air in short, percussive bursts. The Kestrel can perform the close Combat Manoeuvres Charge, Disarm, Strike and Throw without actually having to come into contact with the target. Attacks may be made upon any target/s within 10 yards of the caster and are resolved as normal. The manoeuvres do their normal damage, except the caster's strength has been replaced by the wind's, which has a Strength of 6.

THE INNER SIGHT

Type: Miscellaneous, Wird
Element: Air
Casting Time: 10 Seconds
Range: Line Of Sight
Area: NA
Duration: 2 Rounds + 1/Extra Wird

This spell is formidable if used properly. Once the Kestrel has cast this spell, they gain +25 dice to their senses, for the purposes of examining a person or object. It becomes very difficult to lie to someone who has cast this spell. They may discover more about the target than anyone expects. Most illusions are seen through without any problem. For the duration of the spell, the caster gains a +2 dice bonus when attacking the target.

LEVEL SIX SPELLS

REDIRECTION

Type: Defensive, Elemental
Element: Water
Casting Time: 3 Seconds
Range: Contact By Target
Area: NA
Duration: Special

This is the art of redirecting a foe's strength back upon them. Once cast, this spell will lay dormant within the caster for 3 rounds + 1/extra Wird, only becoming active with the first successful physical attack made upon them. This spell will protect the caster from up to 45 points of damage. In addition, the attacker will take the damage the caster was supposed to receive, up to 45 points of damage.

KESTREL WIRD SPELLS

LEVEL 1

Blur
Heal Self
Hundred Day March
Leap Of The Frog
Night Vision
Resist Pain Self
Resist Heat
Revive Self

LEVEL 2

Flight
Protection From Flames
Reflexes Of The Rilbec
Shatter
Speed Of The Fox
Vision Of The Bat
Wilder-beast's Skin

LEVEL 3

Cure Disease Self
Flame Armour
Heal Self
Magic Resistance
Vigour Of The Bawk'sha
Wall Runner
Water Armour

LEVEL 4

Body Of Air
Fatal Vibration
Leap The Mountain
Reflexes Of Lightning
Thousand Day March

LEVEL 5

Armour Ablaze
Total Healing Self

LEVEL 6

Body Of Flame

SAMPLE CHARACTERS

The following pages give examples of five Kestrels in Providence today. They may be used as NPCs for your Providence campaign, inspiration for a new character, or even templates to help you quickly design a workable Kestrel.

WILEAS ASHEN-WING

SHOJAN OF SUNARIUS KEEP, CLIFF-SPIDER

"Take my word for it, young Kenjho. Nothing is more important to King Raldowin right now than an elite force of warriors. He knows our ways well, and when war comes to Cliff-Spider it is we who shall be called."

Wileas Ashen-Wing, the most powerful Quartermaster in all of Providence, is a troubled soul. Upon him rests the burden of the greatest Keep in Providence, renowned among all Kestrels as the heart of the Order and home to many great changes in history.

But Wileas feels he cannot question a treaty made nearly fifteen hundred years ago, and still honoured to this day. The Kestrels of Sunarius cannot become involved in politics, or else they will lose the continuing trust and employment of the city's nobles. With many of the Order calling for expansion, diversification and progression, Wileas doesn't know what to do. Instead of making a decision, he withdraws into the security of his Keep and allows his Kenjho to administer for him.

His noble Hawk parents had Wileas apply to the Order at a young age, and he took to the life of a Kestrel well. Throughout his immaturity he showed an especially keen interest in the history of the Order and its traditions. He was especially enthusiastic during the rituals of the Order and soon exemplified all that was noble in a Kenjho.

Within ten years of his maturity he had become Kenjho. After another five, the ageing Eagle Shojan Karl had nominated him as heir. Karl died just a few years later; Wileas' rise to Shojan was uncontested and met with enthusiasm by his peers.

It was here that Wileas' dilemma began to take shape. Burdened by his extensive knowledge of the past, he found himself increasingly unable to reconcile what he saw as the foundations of the Order with the rapidly-changing world of Providence.

Wileas appointed Kalia as Dai'jan when her predecessor died unexpectedly without appointing an heir. Wileas sought comfort in his new Dai'jan, and the two became close. It wasn't long before they were lovers. Even this did not lift the weight from his shoulders, and though Kalia tried to aid



Wileas, she found herself increasingly drained by his depressive nature. In time she ended their relationship, and Wileas accepted the news with the same weary resignation he now showed towards all things.

Kalia was not unkind, and instead offered to relieve Wileas of his burden by more direct means; she was already present during his Yanza'sho, but now she would advise him on other matters of the Keep. Wileas accepted this offer with relief, and Kalia began urging him to appoint more Kenjho. In turn ensuring they reported to her as well as Wileas.

Wileas now finds himself locked in a cycle of resignation and depression; he has been Shojan for twenty years, and for ten of them Kalia has been the real decision-maker. Wileas knows he must face King Raldowin and make claims for the Order but he insists on continually putting the matter off, hoping it will resolve itself. Only time will tell if one day Wileas will find the required courage — or if someone such as Kalia will take the decision out of his hands once and for all.

WILEAS ASHEN-WING

Troupial: Hawk

Profession: Kestrel Shojan

CHARACTERISTICS

2 Coordination	2 Strength	2 Constitution
2 Intelligence	1 Willpower	-1 Psyche
2 Appearance	1 Charisma	2 Perception
-2 Aura	24 Wind	
8 Body	8 True Body	24 Endurance

SKILLS

Innate

1 Acrobatics	2 Athletics	1 Awareness
1 Body Language	3 CM - Belt Throw *	2 CM - Charge Δ*
3 CM - Dodge *	3 CM - Flying Kick *	4 CM - Nerve Strike Δ
3 CM - Parry Δ*	4 CM - Strike *	3 CM - Sweep Δ
2 CM - Throw Δ	2 CM - Turn Attack Δ	1 Flight
3 Intimidation	4 Teaching	

Learned

3 Battle Tactics	3 Breakfall	2 Bureaucracy
4 Etiquette	3 First Aid	4 Hand to Hand
4 Leadership	4 Meditation	3 Multiple Strike

Studied

3 AK - Cliff-Spider	2 AK - Exodus Plains	3 AS - Exodus Plains
3 AS - Sunarius Keep	3 Art History	2 Bio - Physical Anatomy
4 History (Kestrels)	5 MA - Shii'dlin *	3 MA - Mai-Shan Δ
4 Medicine	3 Philosophy	1 Politics
2 Psychology	2 Resist Pain	

ABILITIES

Claws - 3 points, Hard Damage

Increased Sense, Sight - Tier 1

Wings - Tier 4

TRAITS

Abnormal Appearance -3

Behaviour - Curious

Behaviour - Humorous (-1)

Behaviour, Ext - Competitive with Hawks (-4)

Caste Status - Pure

Good Flyer

Reputation +2 (Shojan of Sunarius)

Ambidexterity +5

Behaviour - Depressive (-1)

Behaviour - Will never use weapons (-)

Behaviour, Ext - Dedicated to Kestrels (-4)

Combat Reflexes

Reputation +5 (Good Fighter)

Social Responsibility -1 (Command Kestrels)

IQBAL SAMRAI

Troupial; Eagle

Profession: Kestrel Dai'jan

CHARACTERISTICS

1 Coordination	1 Strength	1 Constitution
2 Intelligence	1 Willpower	2 Psyche
0 Appearance	0 Charisma	1 Perception
2 Aura	33 Wind	
9 Body	9 True Body	20 Endurance

SKILLS

Innate

2 Acrobatics	1 Athletics	1 Awareness
2 Body Language	2 Charm	3 CM - Dodge *
3 CM - Flying Kick *	2 CM - Furious Shield *	2 CM - Parry *
2 CM - Strike *	3 CM - Wrath of Iasha *	2 Intimidation
2 Stealth	2 Teaching	

Learned

1 Battle Tactics	2 Breakfall	3 Bureaucracy
2 Etiquette	2 First Aid	2 Hand to Hand
1 Leadership	3 Meditation	1 Melee
1 Multiple Strike	1 Streetwise	

Studied

1 AK - Exodus Plains	2 AK - Haak San Bazaa	1 AS - Exodus Plains
2 Bio - Physical Anatomy	2 History (Kestrels)	2 Law
3 MA - Iasha'klin *	2 Medicine	2 Philosophy
3 Politics	4 Wind - Casting	4 Wind - Air
4 Wind - Earth	4 Wind - Fire	4 Wind - Water

ABILITIES

Increased Sense, Sight - Tier 1

Wings - Tier 3

SPELLS

Battle Movement	Body Temple	Blur
Focus	Night Vision	The Third Eye
Dance Of The Flames	Falling Leaf	Riss Of Iasha
Protection From Flames	Speed Of The Fox	
Cure Disease Self	Flame Armour	Footfalls Of The Tiger
Harness The Fire	Solidity	
Body Of Air	Call Of The Gath Hadatchi	Fatal Vibration
Take Root	Warrior's Form	

TRAITS

Abnormal Appearance (-5)	Ambidexterity
Behaviour, Ext - Deceptive (-4)	Behaviour - Will never use weapons (-1)
Behaviour, Ext - Dedicated to Kestrels (-4)	Caste Status - Pure
Combat Reflexes	Contacts +5 (Various Council members)
Deep Secret -2 (Personal History)	Enemy -3 (Gul)
Literate	Reputation - Politically adept (+2)
Reputation - Dai'jan of Al-Budozan (+2)	Reputation - Good Fighter (+2)
Social Responsibility -1 (Commanding Kestrels)	Wind Sensitive

IQBAL SAMRAI

DAI'JAN OF AL-BUDOZAN
KEEP, HAAK SAN BAZAA

"Do not speak to me of tradition and honour — I have never acted without regard for either. But the Order has survived only through change and progress, and we must do this again."

Iqbal is somewhat of an enigma, even to those of the Order. He became a member after approaching Aslam, then Shojan of Al-Budozan, when still a young teenager and already a Wird caster. After Iqbal did better than expected against the Dai'jan in combat, Aslam ordered his confidantes from the room and spoke to the young Eagle in private. Half an hour later Iqbal was accepted into the Order, and Aslam would not speak of the matter.

Iqbal did not disappoint the Order, becoming Kenjha before he had reached his twentieth year. By this time he had also become a potent Wird caster. He had also formed a strong bond with one of his roommates, a Dragon named Sharonjit. None knew of his family, his past or where he had come from, and Iqbal was never forthcoming with the information.

One of the young Kenjha's first assignments would prove to change his destiny forever. Iqbal was one of the best students of Gul, the Dai'jan, and like him had become a practitioner of Iasha'klin.



Two families in Haak San Bazaa had been feuding for some time. One of them, sick of the conflict, approached Gul personally to act as an envoy between them. Gul could not take the job due to other commitments, but he did not hesitate to recommend Iqbal in his place. So the young Eagle found himself appointed to a very important task, delivering an offer of treaty from one of the most powerful families in the city to another.

When he arrived, Iqbal did not get the reception he expected. Instead of meeting with family officials, the family's guards attacked him, crying treachery. Iqbal managed to overcome his attackers while the head of the family escaped, and finally interrogated one of the few guards who was not yet dead.

From the guard's information Iqbal realised he had been set up; the family had been told that he would be arriving, that he was an assassin and his only intention was to kill them. He also discovered who had told the family this false information — Gul.

Confused and disheartened, Iqbal returned to the Keep to gain vengeance against his jealous Dai'jan. With the aid of Sharonjit, who had been shocked and angered at his story, he managed to convince Aslam and the other Kestrels of the truth of his story. Gul was exposed and exiled. This episode ended up boosting Iqbal's standing within the Keep. Years later he became Dai'jan himself; soon after, Aslam died. Iqbal helped choose the new Shojan, his friend Sharonjit. For the last seven years they have together transformed the Kestrels of Al-Budozan into the most modern Keep of the Order.

Iqbal is unforgiving and ruthless in his execution of work. As Dai'jan, he has made many pacts and agreements with the families of the Mercantile Council, and plays a very balanced game of politics.

There is no doubt that this dark, sinister Dai'jan has his own agenda, but it is mainly concerned with furthering the Order within Providence rather than personal gain. Both Iqbal and Sharonjit have an extreme distaste for stagnation, and little respect for those in power on the Council. They see progression as the salvation of the Order.

Iqbal rarely goes outside the Keep these days, preferring to communicate with his external allies via messenger. He is aware that he has made many enemies in the city and he is not rash. He also believes that Gul still lives and Iqbal knows there are some Merchant Band families who have no objection to employing a powerful Yinsha'jan.

CHRISLA SWIFT-TAIL

KENJHO OF DOMEKA, CRY-STAR

"Truly this city is chaos incarnate. In twenty years as Kenjha, I still know less than half of it by rote. Every day there is something new — every day I glimpse another fragment of this thing we call life. How could I possibly become bored?"

Chrisla is as much a part of Domeka as Ronhart himself; indeed, she is older than the Shojan by nearly ten years. Chrisla's main strength lies in her diplomatic and friendly nature; she is no braggart or boaster, instead being quietly confident and often even humble. For her there is always something new to learn, something unseen to behold.

Chrisla hails from a distinguished family within Cry-Star, and went to the Keep's open day upon the wishes of her parents. She was a capable, if not exceptional student, and progressed steadily through her career. Her family, however, had expected her to return to live with them when she became Kenjha. When she did not, they became angry with her and tried to tempt her back.

It was then Chrisla realised her family had taken her to the Kestrels with an ulterior motive. They wished for her to return and act as a tool in their political games of House and Chapter.

CHRISLA SWIFTTAIL

Troupial: Dragon

Profession: Kestrel Kenjho

CHARACTERISTICS

1 Coordination	0 Strength	1 Constitution
1 Intelligence	1 Willpower	1 Psyche
1 Appearance	2 Charisma	1 Perception
1 Aura	30 Wind	
7 Body	7 True Body	20 Endurance

SKILLS

Innate

1 Acrobatics	1 Athletics	2 Body Language
3 CM - Dodge Δ*	3 CM - Flying Kick *	2 CM - Nerve Strike Δ
2 CM - Parry *	3 CM - Strike Δ*	3 CM - Sweep Δ
2 CM - Throw Δ*	3 CM - Total Combination *	2 CM - Turn Attack Δ
2 Small Talk	2 Teaching	

Learned

1 Battle Tactics	2 Breakfall	3 Etiquette
2 First Aid	2 Hand to Hand	1 Leadership
2 Meditation	1 Multiple Strike	1 Streetwise

Studied

2 AK - Cry-Star	1 AS - Cry-Star	2 History (Kestrel)
2 Bio - Anatomy	2 MA - Mai-Shan Δ	4 MA - Tekkan *
2 Medicine	2 Philosophy	2 Psychology
2 Resist Pain	2 Wind - Casting	2 Wind - Air
2 Wind - Earth	2 Wind - Fire	2 Wind - Water

ABILITIES

Altered/Inhuman Sense, Sonar (Hearing only) - Tier 1
Increased Sense, Hearing - Tier 1
Tail - 3 points. Soft Damage
Wings - Tier 3

SPELLS

Body Temple	Blur	Focus
Leap of the Frog	The Third Eye	
Dance of the Flames	Fists of Iasha	Protection from Flames
Shatter	Wilden-Beast's Skin	

TRAITS

Abnormal Appearance -S	Behaviour - Will never use Weapons (-1)
Behaviour, Ext. - Dedicated to Kestrels (-4)	Caste Status - Pure
Combat Reflexes	Impaired sense, Sight (-1)
Literate	Reputation - Good Fighter (+3)
Reputation - Problem-solver (+2)	Reputation - Trustworthy (+2)

This was not how Chrisla intended to live, and her refusal to accede to their demands widened the rift between them. Soon, her family cut off all contact. They did not actually disown her, but it was clear they wanted nothing more to do with the young Dragon.

This only served to galvanise Chrisla's dedication to the Order. Before long, the newly-appointed Shojan Ronhart had made her Kenjho of the Iron-Scale Temple, home to many Dragon Kenjha. It is a position she has served well for many years.

Chrisla's long career in the Order, and the trials of her family relations, has taught her many things. One of the most important of these is the sense of belonging; many Kenjha come from all around the city to confide in her when they begin to feel alienated or disaffected. Now a true veteran, Chrisla often has an anecdote or reassuring word to give. She helps those who feel lost on their path to realise that within the Order they have a constant family, one that will understand their woes and support them.

Largely due to these selfless activities, Chrisla has also become a close confidante of Brnnur, Dai'jan of Domeka. Were it not for her only mediocre skills in Wird, there are many within the city who would gladly see her replace the old man.



ELIDIA CHARASH

KENJHA OF SUNARIUS KEEP, CLIFF-SPIDER

"The path to my destiny still lies undiscovered, yet when I do find it I will face it with conviction. For my ally is the Fire, and a powerful ally it is."

Elidia's rise to Kenjha is partly chronicled in chapter one. What is not told there, and is known only to a few within Sunarius (including Kalia), is why she came to the Order.

The family of Charash is not unknown in Cliff-Spider, and those who know of its fate understand Elidia's reasons only too well. House Charash was at one time a rising star within the court of the city with some strong allies already in high positions. In the end, none of that mattered; the family was ultimately doomed, or so it seemed.

Elidia was the youngest of three children. Her brother was a Shard and joined the Guild of Archers. Her sister was a capable diplomat employed by the Eagle House of Crackshore, one of Charash's allies. Elidia's parents were aging and had all but retired from the political game, but the remainder of her family, including cousins, were all enjoying positions of responsibility and respect.

Unfortunately the rising fortunes of Charash did not last, for they unwittingly made an enemy of the Raven House Yishkan. In just three years Elidia saw her brother perish on a private contract, her sister assassinated, and her parents killed by Serpenkine while travelling to Cry-Star. Her cousins also fell, one by one, all by means deemed "natural" or "unfortunate."

ELIDIA CHARASH

Troupial: Eagle

Profession: Kestrel

CHARACTERISTICS

1 Coordination	0 Strength	1 Constitution
1 Intelligence	1 Willpower	1 Psyche
1 Appearance	0 Chansma	1 Perception
1 Aura	30 Will	
7 Body	7 True Body	20 Endurance

SKILLS

Innate

1 Acrobatics	1 Athletics	1 Body Language
1 CM - Disarm *	2 CM - Dodge *	2 CM - Flying Kick *
2 CM - Spinning Hurricane *	2 CM - Strike *	1 CM - Sweep *

Learned

1 Battle Tactics	2 Breakfall	1 Etiquette
1 First Aid	2 Hand to Hand	2 Meditation
1 Melee		

Studied

2 Bio - Anatomy	2 MA - Yokosh *	1 Medicine
1 Philosophy	1 Resist Pain	2 Will - Casting
2 Will - Air	2 Will - Earth	2 Will - Fire
2 Will - Water		

ABILITIES

Wings - Tier 2

Increased Sense, Sight - Tier 1

SPELLS

Battle Movement	Body Temple	Detect Will
Focus	Heal Self	The Third Eye
Dance of the Flames	Falling Leaf	Fists of Isha
Shatter	Speed of the Fox	Vision of the Bat

TRAITS

Abnormal Appearance -5	Abnormal Appearance -2 (No left ear)
Behaviour - Will not fight with weapons (-1)	Behaviour Ext. Dedicated to the Kestrel (-4)
Behaviour Ext. Honourable (-4)	Behaviour Ext. Wants to avenge family (-4)
Caste Status - Blessed	Combat Reflexes
Enemy - House Yishkan (-4)	Good Flyer
Light Sleeper	Literate
Reputation - Good Fighter (+2)	

Elidia always suspected Yishkan to be behind these "accidents." When common street muggers killed the last of her direct family, she turned to the Order. She was in need of time to grow, to fully develop her own youthful powers, and she had nowhere else to go.

Much of her training has calmed Elidia's feelings of vengeance, but there is still a part of her that longs for retribution on House Yishkan. Now she is a Kenjha, Elidia has no doubt that Yishkan has not forgotten about her. She plans to soon seek further training of her Wird powers in Shansar-Mao, so that she may return all the better prepared to face whatever her destiny decrees. The path of this fierce young Eagle is surely one to watch.



HEKKATI, "HE-HAS-BLACK-HEART"

YINSHA'JAN

"Those fools in Entaka banished me because I would not follow a blind path. My only crime was to think for myself — if that makes me unworthy to be a Kestrel, I pity their shallow minds."

Hekkati, originally named He-Dreams-of-Honour, is the epitome of the Yinsha'jan who believe themselves to be the true Kestrels, those free spirits who refuse to accept the rigid organisation of the Order.

Having witnessed Kenjha fighting alongside the militia in Bastion and helping to defend the city walls against Serpenkine attacks from the Sunderlands, the young Gargoyle knew what he wanted to do. The sight of these supreme warriors, black as night and fending off several Serpenkine at a time while unarmed, left an impression on the boy that would never fade.

Right from the time he joined the Order, Hekkati had only one aim: to become the best warrior in Bastion, and defend his home city against all who would plunder her. His fellow Immature often mocked his idealism, and few could sympathise with his hero-worship of Kenjha of old.

It is ironic that another Keep such as Sunarius, would probably have commended Hekkati for his enthusiasm and idyllic vision. Here in Bastion however, in a city under constant threat, life was hard and cruel. There was no place for idealists.

HEKKATI "HE-HAS-BLACK-HEART"

Trouplal: Gargoyle

Profession: Rogue Kestrel

CHARACTERISTICS

1 Coordination	2 Strength	2 Constitution
0 Intelligence	1 Willpower	0 Psyche
0 Appearance	1 Charisma	1 Perception
0 Aura	30 Wield	
9 Body	9 True Body	24 Endurance

SKILLS

Innate

2 Acrobatics Δ	2 Athletics	1 Body Language
2 Charm	1 Climbing	2 CM - Belt Throw Δ
2 CM - Dodge Δ*	3 CM - Flying Kick *	2 CM - Nerve Strike *
3 CM - Parry Δ*	2 CM - Slapping Strike Δ	3 CM - Strike Δ*
2 CM - Sweep Δ*	1 Disguise	2 Intimidation
2 Language (Serpenkine)	2 Orator	2 Stealth *

Learned

3 Battle Tactics	2 Breakfall	2 Etiquette
1 First Aid	2 Hand to Hand	2 Leadership
2 Meditation	2 Strategy	2 Streetwise

Studied

3 AK - Bastion	2 AK - Sunderlands	2 AS - Sunderlands
2 Bio - Physical Anatomy	2 History (Kestrels)	3 MA - Shi'kin *
1 MA - Su'Machao Δ	1 Medicine	1 Philosophy
2 Resist Pain		

ABILITIES

Armour - Tier 1

Bite - 3 Points, Hard Damage

Horns - 3 Points, Soft Damage

Wings - Tier 2

TRAITS

Abnormal Appearance -2

Behaviour - Likes to be close to nature (-1)

Caste Status - Blessed

Contacts - Various mercenaries (+5)

High Pain Threshold

Reputation - Good Fighter (+3)

Bad Flyer

Behaviour, Ext - Defender of Bastion (-4)

Combat Reflexes

Enemy - Gath Hadatichi (-5)

Reputation - Barbaric and Violent (-3)

Reputation - Yinsha'jan (+1)

So it was that, soon after becoming Kenjha, Hekkati found himself quickly at odds with Ruckniet, the Shojan, himself. The young Gargoyle consistently pushed for the Order to become more involved in the defense of the city, even going as far as suggesting the Order become a part of the militia. It was perhaps inevitable that eventually Hekkati would do something rash, and that time came two years after his Kenjha-Mai. Tired of feeling impotent and inactive, the young Kenjha took matters into his own hands. He joined some of the city's regular militia mercenaries on an expedition into the borders of the Sunderlands,

seeing it as a pre-emptive strike against the Serpenkine.

The attack was a surprising success, and nearly all of the party returned alive. Within the Order however, Hekkati was no hero, for he had ignored almost every one of the tenets of the Kestrels in his actions. Brought before Ruckniet, Hekkati was unashamed of his actions and defiantly justified them to the Shojan. Ruckniet did not see things his way, and decided he had seen enough of the young Gargoyle. Without further trial Hekkati was pronounced Yinsha'jan and banished from Entaka.

Now Hekkati lives as a rogue. He does not officially work for the city militia, but he often covertly assembles groups of mercenaries to foray

into Serpenkine territory. Among these warriors he is building himself quite a reputation, and the time may yet come when he and Ruckniet are forced to work together by the Mercantile Council.



CHAPTER SEVEN

RUNNING KESTRELS

"What enables the wise sovereign and the good general to strike and conquer, and achieve things beyond the reach of ordinary men, is foreknowledge."

— Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*

To run a game of Providence involving the Order of Kestrels requires perhaps more planning and forethought than usual, especially in the initial stages. Like any game though, it will become easier with familiarity.

This chapter will advise you, as Game Master (GM), on how best to set up and run such a game. In it, we will look at the creation of Kestrel characters. This includes setting up a group of Kenjha, and other possibilities, such as a group of characters only partly made up of Kestrels. This chapter should also simplify the process of designing scenarios for Kestrels, and using members of the Order as Non-Player Characters (NPC). Finally, you will find three ideas for scenarios and campaigns, and several short "seeds" to help and inspire you when creating your own Kestrel games.

CHARACTER CREATION

"The skilful fighter puts himself into a position which makes defeat impossible, and does not miss the moment for defeating the enemy."

— Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*

In the previous chapter we dealt with the rules of designing a Kestrel Player Character (PC), which all players should be familiar with when designing a member of the Order. It is essential that the GM also be involved in this process, to help ensure the character is balanced with the rest of the team.

As with all campaigns, the character's background and motivations should be one of the first areas discussed. As GM, you should ask your players where their characters came from. What Troupial and caste are they? Remember that most Kenjha are Pure, Blessed or Gifted. What House or Chapter, if any, do they belong to? Why did they join the Order? Are they still in contact with their family? How does their family regard them now?

It is better to get all of these questions, and more, out of the way before you even begin to allocate Characteristics and Skills to the character. The answers will likely influence which Art the character follows. It will also influence how much, if any, Wurd they know, and where their specializations may lie. It is much easier to design characters if you know all of this information already.

When allocating Characteristics, Abilities, Skills and so on, try to make sure that the character has a focus of some kind. There are many Kenjha who have no higher purpose or destiny, it is true, but these are the player characters, and as such they are destined to become heroes — or die trying. Never forget, this is Providence.

If your players are designing a party made up exclusively of Kestrels, it is also a good idea to make the group as well rounded as possible. Whether the players discuss this among themselves or individually with you is a matter of taste. Be assured however, that a party of five Tekkan practitioners with hardly any Wird knowledge is potentially disastrous for the party. Diversity is important.

If only one or two players are to be Kenjha, there should be more opportunity for them each to exemplify multiple aspects of the Order. Still, they cannot spread themselves out too thin, or they will find themselves not particularly good at any one skill. In this case, it would probably be best to rank some specialties and make others inferior. Characters should be very skilled in one of the Nine Arts and then at least competent in another area such as Medicine, Philosophy or Wird.

Once the bare bones of the characters are in place, you should think about where they are on their path of destiny. Are they young, newly matured Kenjha, eager for their first assignment? Or are they more veteran, having been Kenjha for a few years and beginning to gain a reputation for themselves?

Also, you must ask why these Kestrels in particular band together? Were they all taken as Immature in the same season, and grew up together? Or have they come together by circumstance, perhaps to undertake a large, joint assignment? Are they even all from the same Keep?

These choices will influence how the characters interact with one another. If they are not together from their own volition, there will likely be some friction, especially if they are from different Keeps. They may be accustomed to different methods of operation and protocol; they may even distrust one another to an extent. Conversely, if they are old friends they will likely expect to work as a team, watching one another's backs and sharing knowledge.

This decision will also influence the scenarios you design for them. A young band of Kenjha are unlikely to leave their home city much, if at all, whereas a cross-Keep group may find themselves travelling through the wild. A veteran party would be more likely to gain assignments of an important political nature, in Haak San Bazaa in particular. Any group with a strong Wird-using contingent will probably find itself in demand as "problem solvers" more than bodyguards.

Again, if there are only one or two Kenjha present, a more direct answer must be found as to why they have teamed up with non-Kestrels. Perhaps a noble assembled the whole team for some purpose? Maybe the game has a more political bent, and both the Kestrels and other characters are all present at court for their own reasons.

As another option, perhaps the Regent has finally consented to the Kestrels' inclusion in the wilderness scouting parties of the Alliance of Kings. In this case, the rest of the party probably consists of guild members, renowned warriors and so on. The whole party could be together for months on end, depending on each other for survival.

There is one other option open to players, and that is the Yinsha'jan. If you players wish to portray rogue Kestrels, remember that they will not be able to work with other Kenjha. This is, though, one way of incorporating a manner of Kestrel into an otherwise disparate party of characters.

Though much of what has been said will not apply to a player character rogue Kestrel during the game, these characters have still been Kenjha for some period of their lives. Their behaviour should reflect this in at least some way. Yinsha'jan rarely degenerate into drunken brawlers.

RUNNING SCENARIOS

"While heeding the profit of my counsel, avail yourself also of any helpful circumstances over and beyond the ordinary rules."

— Sun Tzu, The Art of War

The key to a good campaign involving members of the Order of Kestrels lies in atmosphere and uncertainty. The working life of a Kestrel (except perhaps those in Entaka) is based around the prevention of conflict. Many Kenjha are but servants to nobles, their very presence discouraging potential enemies. When or if conflict does finally occur, it is usually short and bloody.

Therefore, a GM must do two essential things to keep a Kestrel game moving. First the players should feel part of a greater whole, the Order itself; second, the GM should help the players feel involved in the world around them, whether directly or indirectly.

The first part requires effective storytelling and the creation of atmosphere by the GM. The Order is not as large as it used to be, but it still revolves around other people besides the PCs. Make sure you have a stock of reappearing NPC Kenjha, with their own adventures to tell and rumours to spread. All three of the Quartermasters should be well defined, and the players should know each of them by name. The GM should include promotions of friends to Kenjha, young Immature becoming Kenjha, veteran Kenjha retiring or passing on, and visits from the Gath Hadatchi within their campaigns. These events are part of a Keep's life. GMs should include them so that the players feel their characters inhabit a world that still moves during times when they themselves are inert.

The game should not overlook rituals, especially when the characters are in the Keep. Though the characters themselves would be familiar with the rituals by the time the campaign starts, the players are probably not. Therefore, for the first few games, the GM should go through the rituals in some detail, asking the players for their characters' thoughts and opinions as they meditate, partake in lasha-Mai, and so on. Though this will inevitably "slow down" your first few sessions, it will leave the players with a good impression of the importance of the rituals in the order.

As the game progresses and the characters spend more time away from the Keep, your description of the rituals can become more cursory. Hopefully in time your players will be forthcoming themselves with their actions and thoughts during these "mundane" activities, and thus enhance their characters' spiritual nature. You may even find characters longing to return to the Keep for a relaxation period, or to interact with fellow members of the Order!

Keeping the characters involved in the world of Providence has more to do with the scenario directly. Kestrels are often privy to others' secrets and even sometimes used for political ends, knowingly or not. Whether they are guarding a noble, accompanying a guild member, or travelling across the Exodus Plain with an ambassador's caravan, the Kestrels are always at the side of their charges. In such circumstances they cannot help but "overhear" discussions, whisperings and treacheries.

To keep their employment secure, the Kestrels may be forbidden or unable to use this information for themselves. Nonetheless, that will probably not stop them from telling other members of the Order, and especially the Shojan. It is your task to carefully construct the events unfolding around the Kestrels, while holding the players' interest. While this is the GM's job in any scenario, in one involving the Kestrels, GMs must maintain the Kestrels' curiosity and give them incentive to learn more, although they may not be able to directly act.



DESIGNING SCENARIOS

"Be subtle! Be subtle!"

— Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*

LIFE IN THE KEEPS

There are many types of campaigns you can construct around the Kestrels, and the choice of their home Keep will be an important and influential one.

Sunarius Is, Ironically, based in one of the most political cities in Providence. Yet, by tacit agreement with the rulers, its Kestrels are forbidden from involving themselves in its politics directly. Unless you decide to direct the game towards the internal politics within the Keep, campaigns based in Sunarius will likely become action-packed with the characters having little direct involvement in the city's courts. Due to this very neutrality however, members of the court often try to use Kestrels to further their political machinations. In this way the characters could easily find themselves undertaking nefarious or underhanded tasks for their employers. The maze of tunnels and caverns that is Cliff-Spider should provide adequate opportunity for high adventure.

Because it is in the capital city of the Alliance, Domeka, by contrast, would make for a very political game; here, the Kestrels are not bound by any agreements. They are very much a part of society's upper strata, working only for the highest castes and often for the highest prices. In addition, each temple has its own unofficial hierarchy, led as they are by Kenjho. There is plenty of scope for intrigue between and within each temple. Ronhart, capable a Shojan as he is, cannot be everywhere at once, and there is much that goes on in Cry-Star without his full knowledge.

Al-Budozan presents the greatest opportunity for a direct political campaign, as the Order is intrinsically caught up in the games of the city's government. Due to the absence of the caste system, the characters probably have more freedom than any other city. Haak San Bazaa is a capable setting for an action-based campaign. Remember, there are more assassins here than in any other Keep.

Conversely, Entaka would be suitable for an epic action-filled campaign. The city of Bastion finds itself not only under constant threat of attack from the White Crow, Serpenkine, and Elothorin Avatars, but also of destruction from the encroaching Sunderlands. Here, more than anywhere else, Kestrels must be able to survive in the wilds and fight a great variety of foes.

Finally, Shansar-Mao presents the GM with an opportunity for more politics within the city. This Keep has the greatest number of Fallen Kestrels outside of Al-Budozan. Campaigns in Water-Sister could easily become complex conflicts since the city is geographically also the closest within the Alliance to Bone-Wail.

FINDING, AND KEEPING WORK

The next step in designing campaigns is to decide exactly what sort of situations to put your players in. Suggestions for specific scenarios are present at the end of this chapter, but there a few general points to bear in mind.

Remember that usually, only members of the top three castes can hire Kestrels. This is not just a matter of money, but also of prestige. These days there are certainly some others who could afford to employ a Kenjha, the most obvious example being wealthy merchants. As mentioned in chapter two however, the decision to only hire themselves out to the top three Castes was a very deliberate one by the Order. It helps to maintain their position as status symbols of the elite, ensuring the high prices they demand cannot only be met but are accepted as fair.

This is not to say that a Kestrel would refuse employ from, say, a wealthy merchant, but they would only be able to accept if that merchant is of the higher castes. Remember that except for the Merchant Bands, this practice is extremely rare.

Kestrels are not People's Knights. As a rule, they do not act out of sympathy, kindness or charity. Some Kestrels do undertake favours for friends (and particularly family), but they usually try to bring about a resolution without becoming directly involved in a situation.

Kestrels are also, as mentioned before, not mercenaries. It is forbidden for a non-assassin Kenjha to accept work that requires them to actively attack or harm another. Any potential employer would probably be aware of this rule. One does not hire a group of Kestrels as a "strike team." Nonetheless, this does not restrict them to the task of being bodyguards; it merely requires a little more subtlety by their employers. Some Kestrels even discover they possess an aptitude for one or more activities, gaining a reputation as specialists. They often find themselves more in demand for that type of job.

For example, nobles have employed Kenjha in a perfectly acceptable manner in the past to act as caravan guards across the wilderness. They even work to recover the lost or stolen property of nobles. It is not uncommon for them to work as information gatherers within a city, and as emissaries between Chapters, Houses and other factions. Kestrels' advantage in this lies simply in their reputation and ability to defend themselves. Give a Kenjha a message, a package, or a Messenger to protect and you can be sure that it will reach its destination intact — or the Kestrel and the message will probably perish in the attempt.

If one or more of your PCs have chosen to live outside of the Keep, perhaps with members of their House, there are even more opportunities open to you. Kestrels such as these live far more within the normal bounds of society than their Keep-bound brethren. Their knowledge of the world at large is generally much better as a result.

These characters are also more likely to have their own agendas, especially on political matters. Still, never forget that their loyalty is to the Order first. There are a few Kenjha who have found themselves branded Yinsha'jan because they allowed the concerns of their families to come before their work.

These Kestrels may find themselves involved in political games, whether willingly or not. It will be difficult for them to remain neutral. Other members of their families or Houses will also often ask them to perform favours, from attempting to subtly influence their charges to simply using their status as Kenjha to ward off other, hostile Houses.

Kestrels' families may expect them to share any knowledge or secrets they pick up during their assignments. Here a Kenjha must walk a very fine line indeed. While it is not technically forbidden to divulge secrets in this manner, the Order certainly frowns upon it. It is similar to the matter of client confidentiality with lawyers. The Kestrels' clients are surely aware that Kestrels gossip among themselves, but are generally safe in the knowledge that the information will go no further than the Order.

If it becomes clear that their comings and goings are being reported to people outside the Order, clients should have no compunction in refusing to re-employ certain Kenjha. They would undoubtedly tell others the Kestrels in question were untrustworthy, and might even report the matter to the Kenjha's Shojan. Of course, wily politicians might not report this matter, and instead either give out false information or attempt to persuade one of their enemies to employ the Kenjha.

KENJHA KILLERS

A quick word on assassins. Remember that, deadly as political courts may be, assassins will not always find there is work for them in that particular line. Kenjha assassins are still Kestrels first and foremost. Many perform "normal" assignments, only embarking on assassinations once or twice a year.

Assassination scenarios can prove to be a problem if only some members of the party are assassins. Even if your entire group consists of the Ginjan's students, most assassins work alone in any case. Assassinations should therefore be rare, ideal for a solo session or two, with the characters using their specialist Arts to help them in other situations as well.

The Guild of Dusk

Kenjha assassins are not Providence's only professional killers — or so people believe. Among the highest castes and the wealthiest and most powerful nobles, many people fear the existence of a secret guild of assassins. Others, especially Kenjha, claim that if such an assassins' group did exist, would it not view the Kestrels as competition? It is undeniable that the Kestrels would present a challenge to the guild. The fact that no one has ever pointed to a conflict suggests either that there is no Guild of Dusk, or that its assassins choose to ignore the activities of Kestrels. Because assassinations only represent a small portion of the Order's activities, they probably would not interfere with the guild's assignments. Still, if the rumours of the guild are true, the assignments they accept would likely interfere with working Kestrels, either as bodyguards or assassins. Stories claim that there are no rules, protocols, or traditions that prevent a guild assassin from murdering. In addition, if the guild does exist, its members enjoy an even greater reputation as assassins than Kenjha. After all, no one even knows if they exist!

Assassins also find they are often suited to the more unusual tasks outlined previously, as their stealthy nature often gains them easier access to places normal Kenjha may have trouble getting to. If you have assassins in the group, use them sparingly, or simply refuse to allow players to create them; GMs may find that this causes less dissent among the players. GMs and players should also never forget that Providence is a heroic world. Assassin characters may not fit into the world very well.

RUNNING ROGUES

Even within the seemingly restrictive doctrine of the Order, it is possible to design adventures with implications far beyond that of "just" guarding nobles from their foes. All it requires is a little thought on your part as GM.

If, on the other hand, you are designing scenarios for a party that includes Yinsha'jan among its numbers, you will find yourself both restricted and having more freedom. On the one hand you can ignore many of the conditions under which Kenjha accept employment, but you (and the player) will also have to think harder about the character's place in the world.

The work of a Yinsha'jan is perhaps more varied than a Kenjha, though not as highbrow; the lower castes will often employ them, if the Rogues decide to seek employment at all. If anything, Yinsha'jan are more akin to normal adventurers, following their own rules; it would not be uncommon to find them making a living as freebooters.

Remember, though, that Yinsha'jan also suffer from many setbacks. They cannot call on the resources of the Keep for aid, and they will not be welcome within many courts or governments. They must hone their skills themselves rather than having a teacher. Finally, they are also in mortal danger should they encounter a Gath Hadatchi.

KESTRELS AS NPCS

"It is only one who is thoroughly acquainted with the evils of war that can thoroughly understand the profitable way of carrying it on."

— Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*

When your players are to encounter other Kestrels, it is important that you determine at least the bare bones of the NPCs in advance. At the very least this should be their Troupial, home Keep and specialist Art, if for no other reason than Hadji-Mai may follow.

GMs should create NPCs who will play more of an integral part in the game as fully as time will allow, bearing in mind the points already discussed. NPCs should never just be there to fulfil a plot function — these characters should have as much background and motivation as the PCs. Time invested in developing these areas of the NPCs will pay handsomely during actual play, and is even preferable to a full listing of statistics. With knowledge of the background of characters, a GM can easily decide on the spur of the moment where their skills lie; the reverse is not so easy.

Remember also that any Kestrels the players encounter outside the Keep will almost certainly be on their own assignments. These may even connect with the players' own interests.

This brings us to the matter of the Gath Hadatchi. It is strongly encouraged that the masked ones be kept as mysterious and enigmatic as possible within your games. GMs should never allow players to play Gath Hadatchi.

What GMs need to do is decide how they wish to use the Gath Hadatchi. Details of the group have been left deliberately vague within this book to allow GMs a certain freedom when using them. You are actively encouraged to mould them as you see fit so as to further your own vision of how the Tran operates.

Many questions regarding the Gath Hadatchi need not be answered immediately, if at all. They are under no obligation to explain themselves to Kenjha, or even Quartermasters. Their comings and goings, rare as they are, should be inscrutable and mysterious to the players. This will allow you to use them as and when the need arises.

There are some aspects of the Gath Hadatchi that should be constant, however. First, they are above the normal law of the Order, and will act as such. They are not used to being challenged, and any Kestrel who does so is in very real danger, both from the Gath Hadatchi and the disciplinary action of their Shojan.

Second, the masked ones are not idly nicknamed; they will use their Moss Masks to the full. It is no bad thing if a group of players encounters a Gath Hadatchi without realising it, or perhaps only realising after the event.

Without doubt the Gath Hadatchi should be feared. Whether or not they really do possess knowledge of hidden Arts, Blight Crow spells or anything else popular rumours attribute to them is completely up to you as a GM. Whatever the case, their loyalty and skills are unprecedented. The defeat or death of a Gath Hadatchi is no light-hearted matter. GMs must carefully consider the implications this would have if they intend to include such an event in their games.

Finally, it is of course also possible that none of your players will wish to play Kestrels. In such a case it is still possible to use this book to enhance your campaigns, by including members of the Order within them. Though they are

loyal and often dour. Kestrels are not unsociable. The inclusion of an NPC Kenjha or two in your game should serve to intrigue the players, especially if they can talk to them. Play them well enough and you may convince your players that they want to portray a Kestrel after all!

SAMPLE IDEAS

"All warfare is based on deception."

— Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*

Here are some scenario suggestions to help give you some ideas and get you thinking. The first three are a little more complete and you can use them "as is" to start an adventure. The following, shorter suggestions are merely seeds that you can extrapolate to suit your campaigns. Please feel free to use these ideas as you see fit, changing anything you think would suit your game better; and above all, have fun!

EXPEDITION

A member of the Guild of Messengers has returned from a solo expedition telling of an omen; while in the Green Barrens, she happened to be above the canopy when she spotted, some miles away, an ethereal figure. Flying closer to get a better look at this strange being, she suddenly felt a tremendous anxiety. As she neared the figure, now just a few miles away, the Messenger's keen sight saw something that made her pause. In that brief moment, the figure again sank beneath the canopy. Still, the Shard saw all she needed to see: a ghostly, cloaked figure, dozens of year-rings on its ethereal wings, gesturing towards an area of the Barrens.

The Messenger, an Eagle named Bellisa, is certain she saw one of the Ghost-Walkers of Horizon Strider legends. The spotting of one of these figures has always been a sign of something important, and Bellisa believes the Walker was trying to show her something — perhaps the location of one of the lost gates!

Bellisa is a respected member of the guild in the PCs' home city or outpost. She does not have a reputation for making things up. The guild has taken her word on trust, and at her request has managed to gain support from the city's rulers to assemble an expedition party. The Order has chosen the PCs to join the explorers.

The others in the thirty-strong party include Archers, Drummers, Messengers and the city's militia. There may also be a Chirurgeon or an Anodyne. The group's mission is simple; led by Bellisa, they are to travel to the area the figure was pointing out and discover what is to be found.

What is in the Barrens? Was the figure actually a Ghost-Walker, or perhaps Bellisa was delirious from fatigue and merely mistook it for an ordinary flier? Could it even have been a scheming White Crow? How well will the expedition party get along, if at all? Will the Guild members resent the Order being called in? And what will they do if it is a Gate? These are the questions the GM and the players must answer.

VENGEANCE

A prominent House of nobles in the PCs' city or camp has made an unusual request to the Order. They wish for a group of Kestrels to reside with them for a while, to guard their home and help solve a deadly puzzle.

The House believes it is under attack, specifically by a Blight Crow. Over the last six months, many members of the family have fallen to wasting sicknesses and cancerous diseases. Many of the older members have already died in their beds, and the entire House suffers from feelings of lethargy and inertia.

The nobles want the PCs to live with them for a while to witness this themselves, and to help put an end to it by discovering who or what is doing this. At least one Wird caster should be a member of the group, as they may be more sensitive to the powers of the Blight Crow. The House is an old one, and has many enemies — the process could take some time.

Is the House really under attack from a Blight Crow? Or is it merely the stagnation of an old, decadent family after years of inbreeding? If it truly is an attack, who is behind it? Who among the House's old enemies feel strongly enough to defy Alliance laws and employ a Blight Crow? Will the PCs fall victim to the same malady?

DIPLOMATIC POUCH

A prominent noble employs the PCs to deliver a package of diplomatic goods to another House within the city. When they arrive at the employer's household to collect the package, they are quickly ushered into a private room and sworn to secrecy, even beyond the confidentiality the Order normally enforces.

If the characters choose to give their word, the employer will take them to a remote part of the household. There they realise why such secrecy is being asked of them; the "package" is a child!

The Kestrels' employer will only tell the group that it is imperative the child reaches its destination, both unharmed and unseen to a family situated on the other side of the city. To this end the group must make the journey by night and use rarely-travelled routes to lessen the chances of discovery. As if this were not enough, the child has recently undergone Epiphany, and the youngster's abilities are unrefined and unpredictable.

Who is the child? Why should someone of a noble House need to travel in secret? Why must the child go to another House? Perhaps the child's House fears for the Shard's life. If so, who wishes to do harm? Will the young Shard answer the Kestrels' questions?

SCENARIO SEEDS

- A Baik'sho has been called, and the Keep is without its leader. The Kenjha find themselves under attack wherever they go in the city. Someone has found out that the Shojan is away and decided now is the time to weaken the Order.

- The characters are hired to guard an ambassador's caravan on its journey to the other side of the Crysarius Sea. As well as getting accustomed to the seas, they must help defend the ship against all manner of aquatic monsters.

- A new assignment finds the characters guarding a member of the despised Guild of Cartographers. Whatever their own feelings, the Kestrels must protect the guild member from potential attackers; considering the reputation of the Cartographers, there are probably many.

- While in the marketplace, a minor noble has misplaced his cloak. The PCs are hired to find and return it. They must follow a trail leading to the underbelly of the city, and all for a cloak . . . but the cloak is not what is valuable. Unknown to the PCs, sewn into its lining is a letter with potentially treasonous contents!

- The characters are given the seemingly normal task of guarding a noble. Unusually, this noble proves very sociable, welcoming the Kenjha and taking them into his confidence, even sharing a few secrets with them. Will they realise in time that the noble is deliberately feeding them false information in the hope the Kestrels will gossip?

- A controversial and unpopular foreign dignitary, is visiting the city as an ambassador, and it has fallen to the PCs to protect the politician while in the city.

- The heir apparent of a leading noble's House is missing, seemingly of her own accord. The noble employs the PCs to find this prodigy, wherever she may be.

- A prominent member of the Guild of Drummers has been killed in a street brawl. Unfortunately, several eyewitnesses swear it was the PCs who carried out the foul deed! Who has framed them and why? What could the Drummer have known that sealed his fate in such a way? What manner of fighter could best a Drummer?

THE ANCIENT YINSHA'JAN

HARD LESSONS

Despite her efforts to conceal her anger, Elidia grew visibly frustrated at the Dai'jan's trying tests. Kalia, the Coloured Quartermaster of the Sunarius Keep, knew she was tasking Elidia far more than other students. She did this not because she disliked the proud Eagle, but rather because she grew more fond of the young woman each day. She secretly regarded her and most Wird-gifted Kenjha in the Keep, as her own children. Elidia however, was different. From the moment she saw her across the Keep's gates, Kalia sensed Elidia was special. The Dai'jan knew Wileas, Sunarius' Shojan, disapproved of favouritism, and she agreed with his philosophy that every Kenjha was unique. For this reason, she worked very hard to suppress her every instinct to focus all her energies on Elidia. Kalia paused and unwittingly relaxed her stance, thinking that perhaps her suppression led her to put Elidia through much harsher measures. Immediately sensing her momentary distraction, Elidia's graceful foot landed firmly against Kalia's jaw. Elidia's slim and nimble build in no way hinted at her strength and power. Unprepared, Kalia fell like a rock to the stone floor. Surprised that Kalia had not blocked what she saw as a simple manoeuvre, Elidia's simmering anger finally rose to the surface. "Why did you do that..." As soon as Elidia allowed her emotions to explode, she realized she was being disrespectful. "...O Dai'jan!" She sometimes still had a hard time managing her anger. Control of one's emotions, Kalia always insisted, was an essential characteristic of all successful Kenjha. Disappointed at her own outburst, Elidia's stance grew soft and her head fell slowly as she muttered to herself. "This is one lesson I have yet to learn."

THE INQUISITIVE STUDENT

Kalia looked at her student, whose formerly flawless form was now evidently weakened. Obviously, Elidia was disappointed that she had lost her temper during their kata exercises. "Do not be so hard on yourself Kenjha." Kalia moved closer to her student. "Yes, so you let your anger take control. What you must remember is to use your anger. Do not fear or suppress it. You must master it before it masters you." Kalia motioned her hands towards Elidia's torso so rapidly that Elidia had no time to block her surprising move. Shortly before landing her blow, Kalia suppressed her motion and whispered in Elidia's ear. "See, this is one instance you could have used your anger in your favour. Do not let your guard down during an exercise." Elidia smiled, but could not help but reveal her nagging query. She allowed herself to question her Dai'jan again. "Why did you let yourself take the blow during our session; especially after challenging me so, O Dai'jan?" "What makes you think I did, "O" Kenjha!" Kalia replied, rubbing her aching jaw-bone. The two women laughed deeply, and relaxed their bodies and minds. Kalia smiled and gently placed her hand on Elidia's shoulder "I think this session is over!" Elidia agreed and replied with a smile. "Yes O Dai'jan." After gathering their things and tidying the room, Kalia prepared to leave. Before doing so, she noticed Elidia's pensive demeanour. "Is everything all right Kenjha?" "I am simply

concerned with something our Shajan said today," Elidia replied. "What might that be?" Kalia asked and retreated in the room. "That we may have Kenjha brethren who are our enemies, perhaps in Bone-Wail." Kalia sat on the cold stone and acknowledged her concerns. "Young disciple, your eyes need not reach so far to find our foes. They may lie much closer than you fear." "What do you mean O Dai'jan?" Elidia allowed her concern to lace her words. "Sit." Kalia gestured to the floor facing her. "Let me tell you a tale."

CONFESSIONS

The Dai'jan and her Kestrel sat on the chamber's floor. The day was almost over and darkness had once again begun creeping over the Keep. The square chamber was simple and utilitarian like every other room in the Sunarus Keep. Aside from the two women, a single candle and a bundle of pillows lay on the stone. Only the candle's flaming wisps enabled Elidia to capture Kalia's form. The wind blowing into the room began teasing the gentle flame, causing it to flutter madly in every direction. Occasionally, Elidia's Dai'jan seemed to disappear as the shadows crept and retreated over Kalia in unison with the golden light. The rhythm of the darkness and the light's intimate dance reminded Elidia of their Order's many rituals and meditation sequences. Elidia half-wondered if Kalia was not using a spell in her vast repertoire to control the mood. Elidia could barely stand the silence. She grew impatient and felt her breath become deeper and harsher, almost consuming the candle's light in her own body's blistering flame. Elidia wondered if Kalia waited because she sensed her student's impatience. The young Kenjha determined to master the moment. Once Elidia began moving to the beat of the wind and the flame, Kalia began her tale. "The existence of Yinsha'jan is nothing new to our world. Although they may have held a different epithet, they thrived on Yas'Wail. This tale recounts the history of the first and most disloyal Yinsha'jan." Despite the flurry of questions running through her mind, Elidia sat quietly. Still, she could not help but look confused, and her Dai'jan, accustomed to Elidia's quizzical nature, anticipated her concern. "You wonder what the history of Yas'Wail's Kenjha rebels has to do with Providence? Sit, listen, and you will learn." Elidia's worries seemed momentarily allayed, and Kalia continued her tale.

REVELATIONS

"As I am sure you know, there are many reasons why Kenjha become Yinsha'jan." As Kalia, Elidia's Dai'jan, began unravelling her drama, she seemed unusually stiff in her choice of words; obviously, Elidia thought, this was her first time revealing this story. The young Kenjha wondered why her Dai'jan chose her to expose this rare tale, but she decided not to question her motives. "These Kenjha not only broke our rituals, but they challenged our beliefs," Kalia continued her tale. "Their greatest crime was to give their allegiance to one god, the deceptive lord of shadows, Jullidek. The Trian at the time ordered Kenjha to hunt down the betrayers who continued to work as Kenjha. Our brothers and sisters fought each other and many

Kenjha died. In addition, our Order lost much of the respect our Founder had worked so hard to obtain. A sense of Paranoia gripped the Trian and all Shojans. While they devised new and skilful ways to defile each other, many Kenjha forgot the basic ideals and rituals that bind the Order. After years of brutal warfare, the Yinsha'jan met with defeat. Gleeful with arrogance, the Trian assumed all the rebels surrendered or died. Secretly, they remained in service to a royal family." Elidia swallowed each word as if they sustained her breath. She assumed that Kalia's pause meant the Dai'jan finished her tale. "By the sacred lasha Mail!" Elidia propelled herself into the air. "They made it through the gates didn't they? They're here, they're in Providence!"

RUMBLINGS OF STRIFE

Kalia remained seated while her student, obviously overjoyed at her discovery, danced through the air. After a few seconds, Elidia sat down again, not wanting to disrespect her Dai'jan who chose her to reveal this tale. "You are right, these rebels are here among us." Kalia admitted. "Where are they O Dai'jan, so that we may hunt them too?" Elidia enthusiastically expelled. "Is that what you wish to do? To hunt them down, to start a war?" Kalia commented. "Are we not supposed to hunt down all Yinsha'jan?" The student remarked. "Yes, I am merely asking if they are Yinsha'jan, or simply something else. You should know that these Kenjha no longer consider themselves Kestrels. They wear a different brand from ours. Remember that thousands of years separate us now. Much has changed since then." Elidia's jubilation faded slowly. "Are you saying we should not hunt them? That we should just let them thrive?" Elidia asked, puzzled at her Dai'jan's seemingly mixed messages. "Not at all Kenjha. What I am telling you is that some of us will undoubtedly label them Yinsha'jan. I am merely indicating that you have a mind of your own. The choice is yours." Kalia raised herself from the floor, indicating to Elidia that her tale had reached an end. "But, where are these...Yinsh" "Ha'jata is the word you seek," Kalia interrupted. "According to some whispers, they live in the capital." Elidia had not expected her to speak of their sister city. She was sure that the prison camp of Bone-Wail was a more likely candidate. "So what should we do O Dai'jan?" Elidia asked, more confused than before. "Nothing...for now. This is not our problem. If it should become our concern, you will simply have to choose." Kalia left the chamber while Elidia considered her words and stared at the flickering flame of the candle. (See Cry-Star: First of the Free for information on the Ha'jata)

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE HELM OF DUSHAR

Lord Hassendan paced back and forth across the flagstones of his bedchamber, firmly grasping a box in his hands. The Cartographers who retrieved the object served him reasonably well, he thought. Unknown to other families, the Helm of Dushar, a long believed lost treasure, was secretly in Hassendan's possession. Despite his satisfaction, Hassendan knew it could not be long before other Houses found out, especially since he could not trust every Cartographer to keep quiet. He feared that one of Chapter Sollusturm's senior Houses — most likely Crackshore, but perhaps even Kladshea — would demand the crystal artifact, the Chapter's ancestral heirloom, for themselves.

Hassendan knew he did not have much time. He had the embryo of a plan brewing in his mind. He planned to use Nirad, the Guild of Dusk assassin who had served him well so many times before. Unfortunately, he still wasn't sure how to use the killer.

Slowly, a smile crept over Hassendan's face. He recalled one of his vassal nobles recently telling him with pride how her child had just become a member of that band of monks, the Order of Kestrels. Hassendan was no stranger to the Kestrels, and knew their codes. "Yes, I will use the Kestrels," Hassendan thought aloud. "Yes." The lord's smile grew into a wide, confident grin, and Hassendan began laughing softly.

INTRODUCTION

This is a short but potentially far-reaching scenano designed to be played with a small party of new Kenjha from the Sunarius Keep. It will help greatly if at least one of the Kenjha is an Eagle of Pure or Blessed caste. If this is not possible, you can change some of the elements (such as the Chapter), to help it fit with your players' group.

This adventure is designed to be played in one session at most, as it will take place over no more than a few hours of game time. For maximum impact it should start slowly, building up to a fast and frantic pace at the climax as the players rush to their objective.

By the end of the adventure the players will likely be confused, possibly disillusioned with the nobility, and may have gained one or more enemies. Hopefully, they will also be successful.

PLOT

Hassendan has decided to employ a band of young Kestrels to secretly "deliver" the crystal artifact to House Crackshore in Cliff-Spider. The deceptive lord wants it to appear that he is surrendering the item over to them — though the receiving House neither expects the package nor knows of its contents. Instead, Hassendan has also employed Nirad, the skilful self-proclaimed member of the Guild of Dusk, to lead a small band of assassins to attack the Kestrels. Hassendan wants them to steal and return the helm to him.

In this way Hassendan can take the Helm of Dushar for himself and no one need ever know it was even in his possession. Should someone discover he had the object, he will be able to truthfully declare that he entrusted it to the Kestrels to deliver to House Crackshore, a superficially exemplary action. To ensure that the assassins will retrieve the object, Hassendan will ask the Kestrels to employ the young inexperienced Kenjha whose noble family he is friends with. The lord will claim that he is doing the House a favour by doing so.

There is one problem which Hassendan is unaware of, however. The Cartographers who retrieved the artifact for him were also in the pocket of a Gath Hadatchi visiting Cliff-Spider named Redkal. The masked Kenjha knows the Trian would also be interested in examining the crystal item. Its power might be useful, and it could also be used as a political tool, once its rightful owners have been established. As the players set out, so will Redkal, intent on retrieving the item for the Trian.

ORDER OF EVENTS

THE ASSIGNMENT

Stefan, Wileas' senior Kenjho within Sunarius, will call the young Eagle Kenjha within his work chamber. It is early in the evening, just after study period. Here the Kenjha will be told that Hassendan specifically requested the young Kestrel to undertake a mission. Wileas, though bemused as to why the Lord of the House has specifically requested such a young Kenjha, is willing to write it off as "an Eagle thing." In addition, the lord's instructions were very clear and the payment is handsome — 3000 Natlaw Tasks for a night's work acting as an emissary.

Wileas has therefore given consent for the character to undertake the mission, though Stefan advises the Eagle to obtain some assistance rather than just think of the money. If the player objects, Stefan should point out the character's inexperience and once again emphasize the nature of this task — surely the young Kenjha would not wish to risk failure in serving his own family due to pride?

Assuming the player does indeed recruit other PCs, Stefan will give them directions to Hassendan's household, unless one or more of them knows it already; Area Knowledge vs TN 6, as Hassendan is fairly well known. Stefan will also tell the group to make their way there immediately.

As night begins to draw in, the players will make their way to the household with no adverse encounters. Instead, take the opportunity to describe Cliff-Spider's maze of tunnels and enormous cave-mouth windows. The city is built within an enormous spire, and the districts are all caverns and caves of many sizes. The meeting place is located in a lower cave, in one of the lord's small holdings.

At the household, a servant will meet and ask the characters to wait in the main hall. Here, describe the household as stately, regal and large...a typical Eagle structure.

Shortly Hassendan himself will appear and greet the characters. Hassendan is an ageing but vigorous Eagle and will be as friendly to the PCs as the circumstances allow. Hassendan is accompanied by a jet-black Swan who is introduced as Daron, the Lord's "advisor" This NPC is Nirad of the Guild of Dusk, who is here to note the PCs' identities for ease later on during the night.

Hassendan will ask the characters to follow him into an anteroom on one of the upper floors. Once they enter, he will lock the door and bid them to take a seat, fetching from a locked drawer a ten-inch square box. The box is plain but solidly built, and locked. He will instruct them that this is their mission: to deliver this package containing an important item, unharmed and unseen, to the estate of House Crackshore. In addition, Hassendan will give the party a note indicating that the characters are working on his behalf. This will be especially useful if Watchers enquire as to the group's purpose in the city.

Hassendan will not answer any questions regarding the contents of the box. Indeed he will seem firm about this. Still, he will indicate it is no business of theirs. He will also claim that this is a matter purely of importance to the Chapter, suggesting that the package contains something of great importance. The only other point he will raise is that he would prefer it if the characters made their way on foot as much as possible, simply to avoid detection.

Hassendan will ask the characters to leave immediately.

THE CITY

The players will have to plan their own route through the city; the only essential condition is that they remain largely unseen. Certainly the box should be hidden away in a satchel or a cloak.

There is no need to actually map out the party's route (unless you want to, of course!) — instead you should ask the PCs how they are planning to get to the estate. A long, winding route, perhaps to stay away from crowds? Or a direct route through the city centre? Will they travel to lower-caste areas, relying on their Kestrel reputation to keep them out of trouble? Or more wealthy regions, in the hope they will not be as visible?

Below (see Suggested Encounters) are some suggestions for the sort of encounters the PCs may face on this short but dangerous journey; use it as you wish to liven up their progress as they travel.

Do not task the players too much with these encounters, as they will likely have a formidable fight to come later. The most important element in this part of the adventure is speed, and any obstacle you place in their path, no matter how small, will be enough to make them feel frustrated.

In addition to the encounters, at each "scene" you should also determine the chances that Nirad and Redkal will find the PCs. This should be done by rolling a d10 for each party; Nirad will find them on a 6 or more, Redkal on an 8 or more. This chance may be increased or decreased according to how discreet the players are; for example, if they are in a poor area but deliberately staying in the shadows and not scaling rooftops, you might increase the roll necessary by 1 or even 2. Conversely, if the characters are loud and careless you may wish to decrease the roll by 1 or 2.

THE GUILD OF DUSK

Within a quarter of an hour of the group's departure from Hassendan's household, Nirad will also leave to meet the other two guild members and intercept the party. This will give the players a short lead, but probably not enough to lose the assassins.

The Gath Hadatchi Redkal will arrive at Hassendan's household shortly after Nirad has left. Using her Moss Mask to assume the appearance of one of the Cartographers who found the helm, she will ask to see the item. The disguised Gath Hadatchi will claim she needs to make some notes for the guild's purposes.

Hassendan will of course be unable to produce the crystal helm. At this point the Gath Hadatchi will change his guise and threaten the lord. Fearing for his life, Hassendan will tell Redkal of his plans.

Redkal will leave immediately hoping to intercept the assassin and meet the party.

SUGGESTED ENCOUNTERS

WAYFARER PARTY

A group of Wayfarers are in the spire city to gather intelligence and harass the upper castes. The Wayfarers have never been the Kestrels' biggest fans: the sight of four or five of them skulking about would provoke extreme suspicion amongst the rebels. They would suspect the Kestrels of harassing someone of the lower castes or possibly even out to attack the Wayfarers at the behest of some noble. Naturally, the Wayfarers will not hesitate to attack the Kestrels whom they view as caste supporters.

WATCHERS

At the other end of the spectrum, a group of Watchers could easily delay the group to ask them question after question. Although the Watchers have no actual right to detain the PCs, this should not stop the characters from feeling obliged to be polite, if only to avoid arousing any suspicion.

STREET PROCESSION

If the game takes place during a festival, the characters could easily become entangled in a celebratory mob. This would likely occur in a higher area, as revellers line the street. Performers such as Mockingbirds, cavort about for their amusement (and profit!), slowing the PCs down as they fight their way through the oblivious throng. This encounter could easily be combined with one or more of the others, such as...

THIEVES

A band of especially brave (or foolhardy) thieves/muggers harangue the PCs — Kestrels are renowned for being wealthy, after all.

OTHER KESTRELS

It would be a rare thing if the PCs were the only Kenjha with jobs to do tonight. This should not be a violent encounter. An Hadji-Mai in particular would serve to seriously delay and weaken the party. It could easily take a while for the party to finish, especially if the Kenjha are known to the PCs.

PEOPLE'S KNIGHT

A People's Knight would not attack the Kestrels, but how would the group react if they saw one of Providence's heroes fighting a losing battle whilst trying to protect someone from a band of criminals? Alternatively, if the PCs do become violent against, say, the Wayfarers, would the People's Knight intervene?

POSSIBLE OUTCOMES

NIRAD FINDS THE PCs FIRST

This is definitely the most likely outcome, though unfortunately also the most dangerous for the PCs. Nirad wants only one thing — the box. He is unconcerned about the consequences of killing Kestrels and will not hesitate to use lethal force. Any encounter with Nirad's band of guild members will most likely turn into a fight to either submission or possibly even death. Nirad will stop at nothing to retrieve the box, and the PCs are duty and honour-bound to protect it with their lives.

Aside from defeating Nirad, there is only one other option open to the players, and that is escape. Whether they can achieve this through Wird or normal means is unimportant; if the fight is going badly through no fault of theirs, you should allow the PCs at least some chance of escape. They should however, be aware that Nirad will follow.

During the fight, the PCs should also have some (though not necessarily much) chance to recognize Nirad. Perhaps his assassin's mask is dislodged during a strenuous bout, or one of the PCs may possess some ability or skill which will make this easier. Although you should not easily give the clue to the PCs, remember that if they do not recognise the assassin there will be no way for them to discover the truth.

If Nirad retrieves the box he will go immediately to Hassendan's household and return it. If the PCs have fought Nirad, subsequent rolls for Redkal finding them should be made against a TN of 6 rather than 8.

REDKAL FINDS THE PCs FIRST

If this is the case the PCs will be presented with a dilemma. Redkal is dressed as any other Kestrel and will simply appear to them, demanding they hand over the box. Naturally the PCs should refuse, at which point Redkal will tell them that she is a Gath Hadatchi and they are honour-bound to hand over the box. If they actually believe her, she will take it and leave, telling them to return to their Keep.

If they refuse to hand over the box, Redkal will tell them of Hassendan's betrayal in an attempt to convince them. Redkal might even tell them that the Trian is trying to establish who the rightful owners of the mask are. If this does not work, Redkal will be left with no alternative but to take it from them by force. Redkal will use any means necessary to retrieve the crystal helm, but will attempt to do so without permanently harming the group. She will certainly not kill them if at all possible. Hopefully, after seeing her in action for a few rounds the PCs may well decide to believe that she really is a Gath Hadatchi and hand the item over.

If Redkal does tell the PCs of Hassendan's plan, his assassin will probably have more difficulty finding the party. Any rolls Nirad makes to find them should be against a TN of 8 rather than 6. This should reflect the fact that they will not only be more cautious but also probably heading in a different direction than Nirad expects.

NIRAD FINDS THE PCs SECOND

If this occurs then Redkal will, in all likelihood, have the box. The PCs will probably also know of Hassendan's plan, so should be better prepared for a fight with the assassins. Unfortunately, Nirad will not believe that the PCs do not have the box, additionally, should they accuse Nirad directly of being involved in the plot he will try to kill them. This will definitely be the most dangerous encounter for the PCs.

REDKAL FINDS THE PCs SECOND

If Nirad has already attacked the PCs, and they still have the crystal helm, Redkal will demand it from them in the same manner as described above. If it is no longer in their possession, Redkal will demand to know where it is. If they gave it to a member of House Crackshore (see below), she will simply tell them of the plot (if they do not already know) and leave. It is also possible that the assassins took the item from the party. In this case, Redkal will leave to find Nirad.

Should the PCs have made the link between Nirad and Hassendan, Redkal will gladly elaborate for them, telling them all she knows.

If Redkal has to retrieve the Helm of Dushar from Nirad she will succeed - though the PCs may not learn of it until much later (see Resolution).

REDKAL AND NIRAD FIND THE PCs AT THE SAME TIME

This is one possibility which will likely prove to be both dangerous and confusing for the PCs. It should be handled as if Nirad attacks first and Redkal joins the fray if it appears the PCs are losing. She will, of course, aid them and take the crystal item herself. If it looks to her as though the PCs are going to escape or defeat the guild assassins, Redkal will wait until they are finished and encounter the PCs as in "Redkal Finds the PCs Second."

THE PCs CONFRONT HASSENDAN

Should the PCs learn of the plot and decide to return to Hassendan's household, they will be faced with a dilemma. Unless they have proof of the plot (e.g. an unconscious or dead Nirad), the lord will feign indignation and outrage at such an accusation. He will also have them forcibly removed from his home and report to Wileas that they failed in their mission.

If they do have proof he will be left with little choice but to comply. If the PCs have got this far, they probably defeated or escaped the assassins and know the location of the helm. Unless they explicitly state otherwise, Hassendan will assume both of these to be true. Despite the fact that the lord is a scheming traitor, he is still an Eagle. He will not attempt to deny the accusations or confront the characters. What they decide to do with the information is up to them — the obvious solution would be to call the Watchers, or even take Hassendan back to the Keep.

THE CRYSTAL HELM IS DELIVERED

This is without a doubt the single least possible outcome; nevertheless it should not be completely beyond the reach of the players, especially if they are being careful and wise. In this case, the characters will have to gain an audience with a noble of House Crackshore, in this case Juillan, one of the lord's advisors. The head of the House is not going to grant an audience to an unannounced band of Kestrels.

Juillan will take the box, despite his surprise. He will simply assume that someone higher than he within the House is expecting it; the PCs will be thanked for their duty and asked to leave.

If they make it back to the Keep without encountering either Nirad or Redkal (again very unlikely!), they may learn some of the truth. An envoy from Crackshore will visit the Keep to ask them questions. Even if they fail to divulge any information, he will thank and pay them (see below).

RESOLUTION

The resolution of this adventure will depend on how the scenario developed. If Hassendan was exposed, House Crackshore will ensure the PCs are paid for their troubles and give their thanks for acting wisely. In addition, if Crackshore is now in possession of the artifact, they will triple the group's payment to 9000 Natlaw Tasks. This would be a good springboard to have the characters working for Crackshore again at some point, perhaps on a mission of some importance.

If Nirad managed to escape Redkal and return the artifact to Hassendan, the lord will feign anger and complain to Wileas. The PCs will be disgraced for having failed in their mission; no one will believe the presence of the Gath Hadatchi. The characters may well find themselves gaining a reputation they never wanted. However, within the week Hassendan will be dead by Redkal's hand and the crystal helm will be in the hands of the Trian.

If Redkal already has the Helm of Dushar, and the PCs did not make the link between Nirad (now dead by Redkal's hand) and Hassendan, the lord will again complain to Wileas, this time ensuring House Crackshore are told



that the PCs fumbled his "noble" intent to return the item. Members of House Crackshore, however, will not act as they have only Hassendan's word that he ever actually had the artifact. The PCs will simply suffer the burden of failure as above.

In the last two instances, whether or not Redkal informs Wileas of the truth, thus vindicating the PCs, is up to you. Certainly this adventure will decide how Redkal, should the players ever encounter her again, will

view the characters; consequently, it will also determine how the rest of Sunarius Keep will judge the PCs.

HELM OF DUSHAR - CRYSTAL ARTIFACT

The Helm of Dushar should never actually come into use during this scenario, as neither the PCs, Nirad or Redkal know how to use it. It has therefore been left to you as GM to assign the item any qualities, should you desire. The helm is obviously of extreme importance to the Eagles. Perhaps it belonged to an ancient Sallusturm Knight, and was used during the Emancipation? Or could it be more subtle, perhaps some form of Wird-enhanced device which used to belong to the wardens?

Whether the Helm ends up in the hands of the Trian or House Crackshore, it does not have to be the last the PCs hear of it. It can be defined so as to be used to kickstart almost any campaign you wish.

IMPORTANT NPCs

NIRAD

Troupial: Swan

Profession: Guild of Dusk Assassin

CHARACTERISTICS

2	Coordination	2	Strength	1	Constitution
1	Intelligence	0	Willpower	1	Psyche
2	Appearance	0	Charisma	2	Perception
1	Aura	30	Wird		
9	Body	9	True Body	20	Endurance

SKILLS

Innate

1	Acrobatics	1	Athletics	2	Awareness
2	Body Language	3	Camouflage	1	Charm
3	Climbing	4	CM - Dodge	3	CM - Grapple
2	CM - Parry	2	CM - Strike	3	Concealment
3	Disguise	2	Imitation	1	Jumping
2	Running	3	Stealth	3	Tracking
4	WS - Dagger				

Learned

1	Battle Tactics	2	Etiquette	2	First Aid
3	Hand to Hand	2	Lip-Reading	3	Melee
2	Multiple Strike	2	Riding	1	Sleight of Hand
3	Streetwise				

Studied

4	AK - Cliff-Spider	3	AK - Cry-Star	3	AK - Exodus Plains
3	AS - Exodus Plains	1	Chemistry (poisons)	2	History
2	Law	2	Medicine	1	Philosophy
3	Politics	2	Resist Pain		

ABILITIES

Sound Control - Tier 2
Sound Suppression - Tier 3
Wings - Tier 3

TRAITS

Amidexterity	Behaviour - Dedicated
Behaviour - Emotional	Behaviour, Ext - Monogamous
Combat Reflexes	Caste Status - Pure
Contacts - Hassendan (3)	Organization - Guild of Dusk (3)
Wealthy (5)	

GUILD ASSASSINS

Troupial: Various

Profession: Guild of Dusk Assassins

CHARACTERISTICS

1	Coordination	1	Strength	1	Constitution
1	Intelligence	1	Willpower	1	Psyche
0	Appearance	0	Charisma	2	Perception
1	Aura	30	Wird		
8	Body	8	True Body	20	Endurance

SKILLS (significant skills only)

Innate

3	CM - Dodge	2	CM - Grapple	2	CM - Parry
2	CM - Strike	3	Concealment	3	Stealth
2	Tracking	2	WS - Dagger		

Learned

2	First Aid	2	Hand to Hand	2	Melee
2	Streetwise				

Studied

3	AK - Cliff-Spider	1	Chemistry (poisons)	2	Medicine
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ABILITIES

50 points of Shard abilities

Will vary according to Troupial

TRAITS

Behaviour, Ext - Dedicated (Guild)	Combat Reflexes
Light Sleep	Organization - Guild of Dusk (2)

ASSASSIN'S POISON

Nirad and his assassins use a poison which causes 3 points of Hard damage for 2 rounds. Each assassin should carry 2 to 5 doses of the poison.

REDKAL

Troupial: Eagle

Profession: Kestrel Gath Hadatchi

CHARACTERISTICS

2	Coordination	1	Strength	2	Constitution
1	Intelligence	0	Willpower	1	Psyche
1	Appearance	0	Charisma	1	Perception
1	Aura	33	Wird		
9	Body	9	True Body	24	Endurance

SKILLS

Innate

1	Acrobatics	2	Athletics	2	Awareness
2	Body Language	2	CM - Dodge *	4	CM - Dodge Δ*
3	CM - Flying Kick Δ	3	CM - Parry *	3	CM - Spinning Hurricane Δ
4	CM - Strike Δ*	2	CM - Sweep Δ	2	CM - Throw Δ*
3	CM - Total Combination *	1	Intimidation	2	Stealth

Learned

2	Battle Tactics	3	Breakfall	2	Etiquette
2	First Aid	2	Hand to Hand	2	Meditation
3	Multiple Strike	2	Streetwise		

Studied

2	AK - Cliff-Spider	2	AK - Exodus Plains	2	Bio - Physical Anatomy
2	History (Kestrels)	4	MA - Tekkan*	3	MA - Yokosh Δ
3	Medicine	2	Philosophy	2	Politics
2	Psychology	2	Resist Pain	3	Wird - Casting
3	Wird - Air	1	Wird - Earth	3	Wird - Fire
3	Wird - Water				

ABILITIES

Increased Sense, Sight - Tier 1

Wings - Tier 3

SPELLS

Battle Movement	Blur	Focus
Heal Self	Night Vision	Summon The Fire
The Third Eye		
Dance of the Flames	Falling Leaf	Fists of Iasha
Protection from Flames	Shatter	
Cure Disease Self	Harness the Fire	Heal Self
Footfalls of the Tiger	Wall Runner	

TRAITS

Abnormal Appearance -5	Ambidexterity
Behaviour, Ext - Dedicated to Kestrels (-4)	Caste Status - Pure
Combat Reflexes	Good Flyer
Reputation - Good Fighter (2)	Reputation - Gath Hadatchi (4)

EQUIPMENT

Moss Mask — functions as Disguise Self (pg. 168 Providence Main Rule Book)

HASSENDAN

Troopial: Eagle

Profession: Lord of House Hassendan

CHARACTERISTICS

0	Coordination	1	Strength	1	Constitution
2	Intelligence	1	Willpower	0	Psyche
0	Appearance	1	Charisma	1	Perception
2	Aura	33	Wird		
7	Body	7	True Body	20	Endurance

SKILLS

Innate

2	Awareness	3	Body Language	3	Bribery
3	Charm	2	Intimidation	3	Oration

Learned

3	Bureaucracy	3	Etiquette	2	Leadership
2	Strategy				

Studied

2	AK - Cry-Star	2	AK - Exodus Plains	2	AS - Cry-Star
2	Heraldry	3	History	2	Law
1	Melee	2	Philosophy	4	Politics
2	Psychology	2	Wird Lore	2	Wird - Casting
2	Wird - Air	2	Wird - Earth	2	Wird - Fire
2	Wird - Water				

ABILITIES

Increased Sense, Sight - Tier 1

Wings - Tier 3

SPELLS

Armour of Air	Far Speaking	Fasten
Fog	Infravision	Night Vision
Revive Self	Vision of the Eagle	
Air Elemental	Darkness of the Deep	Disguise Self
Earth Armour	Flash	Glyph
Sleep	Spider's Walk	

TRAITS

Behaviour, Ext - Devious	Caste Status - Pure
Contact - Nirad (4)	Contact - Guild of Cartographers (3)
Reputation - Machiavellian (-4)	Wealthy (6)

PROVIDENCE

THE ROLE-PLAYING GAME

Main Rule Book - The Main Rule Book contains both the basic and advanced rules, spells, skills and powers needed to run virtually any style or genre of role-playing game. Simple yet realistic, the Creative System™ provides GMs and players alike with a wide range of flexibility and playability that few game systems offer.

Main World Book - The world of Providence is a place of high fantasy where the Arthurian legacy of grand chivalry is mixed, like a potent elixir, with the steel of super-heroes. The Main World Book introduces this world in detail, describing the races, its history, geography and social structure.

The Ecology - This book provides source information on the creatures of Providence. Woven into this superbly illustrated volume are stories, hints of things to come and a wealth of secrets. This heavily illustrated book will provide GMs with far more information than one would expect to find in a book of creatures.

GM Compendium with GM Screen - This first source book will give GMs as much help as possible in starting their campaigns. Included are the characteristics for several of the major NPCs, a number of story and campaign ideas and new magic items and abilities. The Providence GM Screen and a character sheet package are also included with the GM Compendium.

The Recognizers - This source book includes the history and organization of Providence's bounty hunters, as well as 20 of the most wretched, depraved and lucrative bounties available. In addition, this source book presents aspiring hunters with a variety of new skills, spells, items, traps and hunting strategies.

People's Knights - Being a hero takes more than just a costume and super-human ability. This source book explores what it is to be a hero in Providence. Included in this book are 20 of the most prominent People's Knights operating within Providence as well as new abilities and character creation ideas.

Cry-Star Source Book - This first city source book for the world of Providence presents one of the most powerful cities in the Alliance of Kings. Cry-Star is a floating city situated in the middle of a lake. Rife with intrigue and political games, Cry-Star begins the Providence epic. Included in this book are detailed descriptions, important characters and maps of the city.

The Kestrels: Becoming Fire - This source book explores Providence's monastic order of martial artists. Included in this book are advanced rules for martial arts in the Creative System™. This book also covers the history, organization and practices of the Kestrels, giving players and GMs alike information on how to incorporate these lethal warriors into a game of Providence.

Coming Soon

Cliff-Spider Source Book - This second city source book for the world of Providence details the war ciadel of the Alliance of Kings. Cliff-Spider is built into one of Providence's massive spires. As the city prepares for war, internal strife threatens to tear the city apart. Cliff-Spider helps launch the epic of Providence.

The Horizon Striders - The world of Providence lays ready for the brave to discover. This source book examines the history of the Horizon Striders, the most dedicated explorers in Providence. For the hearty who wish to explore the world of Providence, this book is a must.

The Lost Tribes - The people of Providence are faced with several threats, none more enigmatic than the Lost Tribes, the powerful races that inhabited Providence before the coming of the Ysa Walkans. This book explores the tribal Serpenkine, the alien Swarm Dancers, the aggressive Green People and the mystical White Crow.

Bone-Wall - This third city source book for Providence details the oppressive warden capital, Bone-wall. Home to the powerful and evil Warden Elarian, Bone-wall plays a vital role in the unfolding story of Providence. This book will include information on the wardens and their prisoner charges. It will also explore some of the dark powers which the wardens use in their effort to subjugate all of Providence.

The Book of Wurd - Written by Steven Long, this source book expands and further defines spell casters in Providence. The book contains advanced rules for spell casters, a new and more complete list of spells for the various distinctions, as well as new distinctions of Wurd manipulators. This book is the complete resource for spell casters.



The Recognizers
Available at a store near you



People's Knights
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Cliff-Spider Source Book
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Main Rule Book
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The Recognizers
People's Knights
The Kestrels: Becoming Fire

Cliff-Spider (winter '99)
The Horizon Striders (spring '99)
The Book of Wird (summer '99)
Bone-Wail (summer '99)
The Ecology 2 (fall '99)
The Lost Tribes (fall '99)
and many more



PROVIDENCE

THE KESTRELS: BECOMING FIRE



"For I am the protector of my Lords and bringer of destruction to their enemies. I know not creed, religion, nor caste. I am blind to Troupial, God and Wird alike, for I am the living fire who sees into the heart of mortals, and one who can stand beside me in battle is worthy enough."

The Founder

THE KESTRELS: BECOMING FIRE is a source book describing the Order of Kestrels in the world of Providence.

The elite and enigmatic Kestrel martial artists, with their dyed black skin and arcane rituals, have achieved a unique level of mystique throughout Providence.

THE KESTRELS: BECOMING FIRE includes information on the history and organization of the Kestrels, as well as new Combat Manoeuvres for advanced martial arts and Kestrel spells.



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